Investigating the Perceived Barriers to Women's Rise to Leadership in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

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by

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Abstract

Abundant research has been conducted on barriers affecting women's rise to leadership in Saudi Arabia. However, a number of developments have altered these barriers and this warrants the need for new research on the subject. This thesis is focused on one such development in the form of Saudi Vision 2030. Past research has identified a range of organisational, socio-cultural and personal barriers affecting women's rise to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions (HEIs), several of which have been directly affected by the reforms announced and the steps taken by the Saudi government under Vision 2030. This research aimed to find out how Vision 2030 is likely to affect these barriers and consequently which barriers will continue to affect women leaders in Saudi HEIs. Such studies are likely to help policymakers in understanding how to continue their reform agendas to reach a desired future state.

This mixed-methods research study began with a questionnaire survey of female academics in Saudi HEIs. Quantitative data were statistically analysed using SPSS. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with senior women professionals working in Saudi HEIs, providing qualitative data which were analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

This research finds that a number of organisational, cultural and personal barriers affect women's rise to a leadership position in Saudi HEIs. Furthermore, it finds that Vision 2030 has started to directly affect some of these barriers, leading to a widespread belief that women will face fewer such barriers in future. This research recommends continuing with the current reform agenda in order to significantly bridge the gender gap in leadership in Saudi HEIs. In particular, it recommends giving more recognition to women's achievements in public, acknowledging these achievements in the same vein as men's. Furthermore, it recommends providing women with equal development and growth opportunities. These are among the key steps that could significantly alter the status of women in leadership positions in Saudi HEIs.

Dedication

To my mum Fatimah

To my daughter Sultanah

To my sisters Hala, Basmah, Reema and Haifa

To all the women around the world who fight to achieve their goals

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This thesis has been prepared for the programme of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Lincoln. It involved a lot of hard work, but it has also been rewarding and interesting. This research has provided me with an opportunity to develop my skills within the area of women in leadership positions, and I hope that it can contribute to present research as well as serving as an inspiration for future studies. However, this thesis would not have become a reality if it were not for a number of people who all contributed to making this study possible.

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List of publications and conferences

Participation in Conferences

- EMDoc conference: Impact and exchange – making connections beyond the academy. Won Best oral presentation. Lincoln, UK September 2018
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Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HR	Human resources
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
SD	Standard deviation
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UAE	United Arab Emirates

Glossary

Abaya: Full-length outwear worn by Gulf women

Fatwa: A ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

Glass ceiling effect: Metaphor for the artificial or invisible barriers that block the path of women or other minorities from advancing in their careers.

Mehram: Individuals that Islam forbids one to have any physical relationship with. This also refers to the individuals that practising Muslims are allowed to travel around with freely.

Sharia: Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and Sunna), prescribing both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking.

Ulema: A body of Muslim scholars who are recognized as having specialist knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology

Wali: An Arabic word whose literal meanings include ‘custodian’, ‘protector’, ‘helper’ and ‘friend’.

Wasta: An Arabic word that loosely translates as ‘nepotism’, 'clout' or 'who you know'.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

"*The oil that has not yet been discovered*" is a phrase used by Alhuzeim (2015) to describe Saudi Arabian women. This is a strong inspiration towards thinking and analysing how Saudi Arabian society can invest in this significant human resource. The issue is not unique to Saudi Arabia, as women have long been ignored as a valuable human resource around the world (Khuong and Chi, 2017). Globally, women represent almost half of the human population, but they represent only 33% of managers, 26% of senior managers and 20% of executives (Khuong and Chi, 2017). This indicates that even after making some advances towards participation in the workforce, women have not yet managed to make significant penetration into boardrooms.

Despite increased modernisation and globalisation in the 21st century, gender equality and human rights remain significant issues in the world (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Saudi Arabian women have experienced many social and personal barriers to achieving equality in their society, in both personal and professional contexts (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). In recent years, Saudi women have increasingly participated in higher education (HE) and their participation in the workforce has also increased. However, even after these advances, their representation in the workforce remains much lower than the global average. According to the World Bank (2015), Saudi women's labour participation rate was 23% compared to a global average of almost 48%. Interestingly, there has been a rise in women's education during recent decades, with an ever increasing number of women seeking higher education. However, this has not been translated into a significant rise in women in the labour force, especially in countries like Saudi Arabia (Al-Sudairy, 2017). Although there is significant participation of women in HE, a very limited number are able to reach leadership positions, with limited access to decision making (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Despite the prominent attention of researchers and scholars to women's leadership that consistently emphasises the underrepresentation of women in social, political and economic areas around the globe, very little has been reported regarding the role of

women in leadership, especially in the context of Saudi Arabian higher education institutions (HEIs) (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

The social and cultural norms that are followed in Saudi Arabia are different from those in Western countries. Saudi Arabian culture is mainly based on Islam and Islamic preaching under which female employment was thought to go against cultural values (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Religious scholars and religious leaders in Saudi Arabia have considered that the best role that women can play is that of wife and mother, for which they should remain inside their homes. Islamic traditions and instructions, such as gender segregation, male supremacy and dominance, and the requirement to have male guardians, significantly affect the social and professional roles of women (Kattan et al., 2016). It is true that recent economic and social changes occurring in Saudi Arabia have resulted in an increase in the participation of women in the workforce and have increased the proportion of women in employment (Kattan et al., 2016), although there are only a few sectors where any numbers of women are employed. Against this background, the empowerment of female leaders in HEIs remains a matter of consideration, because the education sector is the largest employer of Saudi females, yet women remain very poorly represented in leadership positions in Saudi higher education (Abalkhail 2017; Alsubaihi, 2016; Abalkhail and Allan, 2015).

According to diverse pieces of evidence, the landscape of women's leadership is changing at a fast pace in different parts of the world. However, despite the improved educational attainment of Saudi Arabian women, various disparities persist that restrict their access to decision-making leadership positions (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). There are many barriers, social, cultural, personal and organisational, that affect women's achievements and their ability to attain leadership positions and decision-making power (Alomair, 2015). The structural characteristics of Saudi Arabian society are influenced by its culture and religion. Therefore, the organisational structures and culture are also influenced by these factors. With limited growth opportunities, women are still lacking in achieving higher leadership positions (Alsuwaida, 2016). This is not to say that there has been no improvement in the employment of women in Saudi Arabian HEIs, but that the level of progress in this regard is well below satisfactory, especially when we consider women in leadership positions. Women in the HEIs and universities of Saudi Arabia are now able to rise to the positions of

professor, assistant professor, associate professor and other administrative roles, but in comparison to their male counterparts, they are represented in very low numbers at senior managerial level (Alomair, 2015). This reflects gender inequality and is also indicative of the many challenges and barriers to scaling the organisational ladder that women in Saudi Arabia have to face.

Whilst research has focused on gender inequality in leadership positions, especially in countries like Saudi Arabia, there are some significant gaps in the research. Women in Saudi Arabia face different social, cultural, personal and organisational obstacles (Hodges, 2017) compared to other countries, but very little has been reported about women's experience of these challenges and barriers. For example, little is known about the experience of women who have achieved leadership positions in Saudi Arabia and what the elements that influence their leadership practice are (Hodges, 2017). Some of the key stereotypical attitudes against women, their capabilities, responsibilities and abilities have traditionally prevailed in Saudi Arabian society. However, it should be acknowledged that the experience of every woman can be different and unique.

One of the most significant and promising policies to come out of Saudi Arabia is Vision 2030. This plan was announced by the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in 2016 with the aim of diversifying the Saudi Arabian economy by reducing its dependence on the oil and gas industry and placing more focus on developing public service sectors, such as education, health, infrastructure and tourism (Beig, 2019). The main goal of Vision 2030 is to enhance non-oil trades and economics. This plan also has a special place for women as it focuses on women's rights and empowerment under the umbrella of human resource development. With the aim of economic and social development, many social and economic changes are being enacted in Saudi Arabian society in order to promote equality and women's rights. Topal (2019) asserts that women's autonomy and their rights are specifically compatible with Vision 2030. Among significant social changes that have been announced and implemented since the launch of Vision 2030 are allowing physical education classes for girls in schools and permitting women to attend sporting events, and a royal decree has granted women the right to drive (Al-Ghalib et al., 2018). The Saudi Arabian government has also announced its intention to relax the laws on male guardianship and female employment (BBC, 2019). It is interesting to note that Saudi

Arabia signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 2000 on the condition that gender equality would be guaranteed under the provisions of Sharia law (BBC, 2019). The significance of this is that the practice in question here, *mehram* or male guardianship, has little relevance to Sharia but instead originates from tribal and cultural traditions. However, Saudi women have not managed to free themselves completely from this practice, even after seven decades. While Vision 2030 has started to tackle some of these old issues, it is yet to be seen if these reforms will bring any noticeable changes in the lives of Saudi women (Ensor, 2019). The proponents of Vision 2030 suggest that its enactment will bring many social and cultural changes that will also impact the perceptions and thinking of the Saudi people regarding the capacities and abilities of women, which will be an important step towards enhancing their position in Saudi Arabian society as well as in organisations (Dirani, Hamie and Tlaiss, 2017).

1.2 Women's leadership

The leadership of institutions within higher education is mainly concerned with maximising the value of stakeholders such as staff, students, parents, teachers and the government (Alomair, 2015). This implies that leaders within HEIs, as academic leaders, need to be more effective and competent in satisfying the requirements and expectations of students and their parents (Alomair, 2015). Leadership development within higher education is the subject of ongoing research, which has found that appointments in HEIs are made according to seniority, which in turn is based on experience, subject knowledge and scientific accomplishment (Alonderiene and Majauskaite, 2016).

Sometimes, while interacting or communicating with students from different backgrounds, the leaders of educational institutions face challenges. The main role played by teachers is related to supporting and encouraging their students to enhance their learning and qualifications by participating in academic activities (Longman et al., 2018). The activities related to education and performance management, for example, are performed by the leaders of educational institutions to comply with the requirements of their students.

There are definitions of leadership that are more concerned with social influence and guidance intended to improve the efficiency of others in achieving suitable targets and goals. Leadership in the current research is explained in the context of a individuals and their personality traits. This study seeks to understand the aspects of leadership in Saudi Arabia that affect women's access to suitable leadership positions.

According to Al Alhareth et al. (2015), official Saudi statistics on female employment indicate that about 52 per cent of female university graduates are employed in the Kingdom and that more than 35,000 Saudi Arabian females were employed abroad in 2014. It might be inferred from these results that highly educated women seek employment not just to join the paid workforce but to match their active lives with their level of qualification.

Education in Saudi Arabia is generally segregated by gender and creates opportunities for women to aspire to higher education (Madsen, 2015), while women in the sector are promoted because they are highly knowledgeable and empathetic in providing the best education for their students. It is useful to consider the example of the Shura Council (or Consultative Assembly), as many female leaders have been appointed as council members to enhance the empowerment of women (Evans, 2014). New policies and initiatives have been designed to improve women's employment and to enhance the quality of education. According to Madsen (2015), leadership among women in higher education will lead to enhancements in critical decision making and thus bring financial benefits by shaping organisational culture and by promoting relational thinking. Madsen (2015) also suggests that society would be better if men thought more practically like women. Female leaders are expected to be highly skilled and educated and have strong powers of interaction that may motivate students (De Mascia, 2015). In other words, women can naturally emerge as leaders and lead to better outcomes (Western, 2019).

In order to support women in their career aspirations, the government needs to have legal plans and policies in place that can shape the advancement of women's employment in the workplace (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Along with this, a strong leadership culture is needed to encourage the active participation of women. This means that higher standards of education would be provided to students by enhancing the active role of educated women in schools and universities. Moreover, HEIs might also consider the empowerment of

women on a larger scale to enhance the standards of education (De Mascia, 2015). There are studies that prove the growing leadership qualities of women that will improve the effectiveness of the HE system (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

1.3 Context of leadership for Saudi women

1.3.1 The role of women in Saudi society

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country whose constitution is based on Sharia (Islamic law) (Al Ghamdi, 2016). The culture, traditions and social hierarchies in the Kingdom are also influenced by the fundamental status of Sharia or Islamic teaching, which has made Saudi Arabia a target of criticism by Western scholars and researchers, specifically in the context of the rights and freedoms of women (Afshar, 2016). According to Mustafa and Troudi (2019), the main problem is the social and cultural norms that have been adopted within a societal structure that places restrictions on women's access to leadership positions in their homes, workplaces and society as a whole. In a kind of academic imperialism, the literature associated with women's leadership in various professions has emerged mainly from studies conducted in the West (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

It is mainly non-academic articles and studies that tend to portray Saudi Arabian women as stereotypes and focus on their status, such as portraying them as erotic and exotic, or as the victims of male oppression and dominance (Eko, 2016). However, understanding the position of Saudi Arabian women is more complex than represented by such non-academic works (Afshar, 2016). Some scholars have associated the problems of women's leadership with the prevailing conservative societal rules and their juxtaposition with the growing trend towards modernity (Gorney, 2016). Others have noted that the concepts of gender politics and religion are intertwined (Al-Moamary et al., 2019). However, the current state of women in Saudi Arabia suggests that they are working towards redefining their boundaries in terms of their economic and professional empowerment.

Some studies have argued that Saudi Arabia has recently witnessed some noteworthy and revolutionary improvements in terms of enhancing the status of women in social, political

and economic life (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). It has also been noted that in the last ten years, there has been an increased enrolment of women in almost all fields of education, which has enhanced the possibility of their employment in various fields (Alsuwaida, 2016). The growing participation of women in different professions has in turn increased the number of women in higher management or leadership positions in the public and private sectors (Alsuwaida, 2016). The social and economic developments that are occurring in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabian indicate that the sustainable and comprehensive development of the country is not possible without the inclusion of all groups of social actors, in order to develop as a global society (Bagley, Abubaker, and Shahnaz, 2018).

1.3.2. Cultural restrictions on employment opportunities

Despite receiving higher education in a number of different areas, women are still confined to certain professions, with the education sector considered as the pre-eminent locus of employment for highly educated women (Alomair, 2015). Alomair suggests that the main reason for this is the traditionally conservative social environment in Saudi Arabia, which tends to make women feel most comfortable in the field of education. Sharia law states that it is the responsibility of a woman to teach and educate other women (Hamdan, 2017) and most of the women working in Saudi Arabia have identified education as the most suitable field for them. There are also many social and personal barriers that restrict women from choosing most other careers (Hodges, 2017). Syed, Ali and Hennekam (2018) argue that there is a lack of gender equality in employment in Saudi Arabia and that the social tradition of gender segregation makes women consider that employment in universities, under the leadership of other females, is safe and empowering for them.

The patriarchal culture whereby women are limited to passive and submissive roles within the household is a tradition with its origins in tribal communities and their interpretation of Islamic beliefs, according to Song (2019). The tribal communities that prevailed in the Arabian Peninsula before the coming of Islam contributed significantly to the development of the culture and customs of Saudi Arabia. In other words, ancient Arabian customs have significantly influenced the status and position of women within Saudi Arabian society. The nomadic and patriarchal traditions of the Peninsula have mixed with Islamic teachings and

been deployed to define the role of women in society (Song, 2019). Studies have identified that socio-cultural barriers pose the most critical challenge for the career advancement of women; Peus, Braun and Knipfer (2015) suggest that the main barriers that women face, albeit of an ostensibly religious kind, arise from the culture that prevails within Saudi Arabian society.

Van Geel (2016) states that women are generally considered to be passive, gentle and sympathetic, thus not appropriate candidates for leadership roles, whereas men are considered to possess natural leadership capabilities. In support of these views, limited opportunities for employment or leadership positions discourage women from trying to work for a better career (Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018). Furthermore, women have limited opportunities to serve on committees and in administrations, they are granted insufficient power, they are not included in decision making, and structures of strategic planning and gender segregation restrict their communication with male leaders (Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018).

Women, who dominate the field of education in Saudi Arabia, are thus separated from the main decision-making processes, even in that field. Men in institutions and organisations of all kinds receive more support and recognition because of the male dominance in leadership positions (Alhejji et al., 2018). There has been a lack of fair opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia, as the culture of male dominance and male supremacy has seized the opportunities that women might otherwise have. Even those women who are able to rise to leadership positions are influenced by male dominance and have limited power in their hands to make decisions (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

1.3.3 Increasing participation but limited decision-making

The subject of the capabilities and skills of women aspiring to become leaders has gained the attention of numerous scholars and policymakers, mainly because those seeking leadership roles and decision-making positions are required to have special skills and capabilities that are also important for the survival and sustainability of organisations (Sidani, 2016).

Elliott and DeFrank-Cole (2018) report that women in Saudi Arabia are gaining leadership positions in different fields. In 2011, King Abdullah decreed in the Shura Council that Saudi

Arabian women could now hold local and national positions in the public sector. As a result, three women were appointed to the Council in 2013 and three later became deputy chairs of the Human Rights and Petitions Committee, the Health Affairs and Environment Committee and the Information and Cultural Committee (Elliott and DeFrank-Cole, 2018). This significant progress allowed women to participate in official decision making. However, a study by Thompson (2015) found that the decree had resulted in the imposition of new challenges and barriers to women in Saudi Arabia, which they would need to overcome for becoming the 'tribalisers' of national development. In other words, the decree has empowered Saudi Arabian women, but they may have to face the more critical 'glass ceiling' effect to justify their leadership potential (Gazzaz, 2017).

Women's participation in politics has been strengthened by the election of Salma bint Hizab al-Oteibi as the first female politician in the country. Women in Saudi Arabia are also increasingly occupying positions in the business and retail sectors (Al-Rasheed, 2018). Other examples of the increasing participation of women in leadership positions can be identified in King Salman's appointment of four women in diverse roles: Tamadur bint Youssef Al-Ramah has become the first women to be appointed as deputy labour minister (Alshaikh, 2019); the Minister of Commerce is also a woman, named Iman Al-Mutairi; and two other women, Professor Kawther bint Mousa Al-Arbash and Dr Ghada Bint Ghunaim Al-Ghunaim, have been appointed to the Board of Trustees of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue (Bell, 2018). These cases provide clear if scant evidence to suggest that women's role in leadership and decision-making positions is being increased in Saudi Arabia, mainly because of the higher number of Saudi women receiving higher education. It is equally clear that despite the increasing participation of women in the workforce, a very limited number are able to attain leadership positions (Topal, 2019). One of the most significant reasons for this may be the conservative perceptions and attitudes of Saudi Arabian people towards the abilities and skills of women.

Women's career advancement continues to be restricted by cultural forces, such as the rules on male guardianship, which seek to keep them submissive to males while fulfilling their traditional roles of mothers and wives (Hoza, 2019). Mustapa, Noor and Mutalib (2019) found that women working in public sector organisations in Saudi Arabia were mainly under the authority or supervision of male counterparts, while Alfarran, Pyke and

Stanton (2018) conclude that this pattern of employment affects the performance and productivity of women and that the persistent intervention of males restricts their ability to make decisions. Other studies have suggested that women in the workplace lack authority because the decision-making process is often centralised and dominated by male leaders (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Extreme centralisation, work culture, management traditions and traditional beliefs that women lack skills and capabilities are major barriers that restrict women to certain professions and become an obstacle to their growth (Aldighrir, 2019).

Organisational culture also has a significant impact on increasing the challenges and barriers for women who seek leadership positions. According to Shailashree and Mlemba (2017), national culture has a significant influence over organisational culture. Their study found that national cultural norms, traditions and customs influence the perceptions and attitudes of people in the workplace. Thus, the patriarchal customs and gender segregation in Saudi Arabia significantly influences the attitude of males towards female employees (Al-Moamary et al., 2019). Although a study by Gorondutse et al. (2019) identified as significant and effective certain initiatives taken by the government of Saudi Arabia to improve the participation of women in education and employment, they conclude that personal and organisational barriers still restrict their growth.

Many social and political changes taking place in Saudi Arabian society have been helpful in enhancing the position of women, but the results are far from being satisfactory (Mustafa and Troudi, 2019). Women are now working in various public and private sector organisations and ongoing political changes will promote more progress, but the impact of traditions and customs continues to pose a significant challenge for Saudi Arabian women (Tiwari, Mathur, and Awasthi, 2019). Social and political changes accompanied by modernisation are required to strengthen support for women's career growth and to increase their participation in leadership positions, in order to develop a more sustainable economy.

1.4 Vision 2030

Previous studies have identified many social, political and cultural barriers that impact women's ability to achieve career progress. For example, Al-Ahmadi (2011) argues that women have limitations in their choice of career field to pursue. They face discrimination in their appointment to higher management positions and traditional attitudes mean that sectors other than education tend to be male-dominated. Abalkhail and Allan (2015) note that women experience various challenges in achieving leadership positions because of the lack of family and professional support. Madsen (2012) explains the lack of women leaders in Saudi Arabia by observing that only a few women are positioned to take such roles. Her study also identifies a lack of leadership programmes and career growth opportunities in organisations, further restricting women in their preparation for leadership roles.

Hamdan (2005) found evidence of a strong religious influence on people's perceptions of and attitudes to women's education, reporting that many religious leaders had objected to women receiving education and warned that it would lead to their moral corruption and the destruction of Saudi Arabian families. Al-Rasheed and Azzam (2012) and Alsubaie and Jones (2017) observe that traditions and customs have shaped the functioning of Saudi Arabian society, such as under the *mehram* policy, which severely affects their ability to make their own career choices.

Two recent royal decrees, one relaxing male guardianship laws for women travelling abroad for studies and other lifting the ban on women driving, have provided much needed relief for women (Al-Rasheed, 2019), as both of these restrictions posed significant barriers for women in terms of mobility and career choices. Therefore, these two significant policy changes mark a ray of hope for Saudi women that a less restricted freedom of movement will help them in their career advancement (Al-Khamri, 2019).

Vision 2030 is an important policy aimed at diversifying economic and investment activities in Saudi Arabia, which has also brought significant hope of development and growth for the Kingdom's women. Since the announcement of Vision 2030, many important social and political decisions have been taken that have lifted many bans and restrictions from women. Earlier researchers have found that restrictions on movement significantly affect women's ability to pursue their careers (Al-Rasheed and Azzam, 2012). Conversely, reforms

such as the lifting of the driving ban and relaxation of the guardianship laws have emerged as major social policy changes that will promote better professional growth for women.

It is expected that through the Vision 2030, many barriers that affect the career growth of women and restrict them from achieving leadership position will be removed, delivering better growth opportunities. According to Varshney (2019), Vision 2030 has been a noteworthy stride that will shake the deeply rooted status quo of the cultural and social fabric of Saudi Arabia. Habibi (2019) also suggests that existing social, religious and cultural restrictions on Saudi Arabian men and women may be removed. One way in which Vision 2030 is expected to promote women's interests is in granting them greater freedom to grow their social networks, which have been identified as significant for successful leadership. The social and economic rights of women have traditionally been restricted by the application of a range of strict policies and rules which have now been lifted, in order to grant them the freedom and right to advance in their social, personal and professional lives. Thus, Vision 2030 can be seen as a uniquely significant policy change that will bring more opportunities for women by removing these traditional barriers to their attainment of leadership positions.

1.5 Research purpose

Gender-based inequality has affected human society for a long time (Khuong and Chi, 2017). However, progressive nations have recognised the negative effects of gender inequality not only on economic life but also on the overall quality of life and have stepped up efforts to address this inequity. Gender inequality has an overall impact on the quality of life in any society and it is therefore useful for societies to overcome it (World Bank Development Report, 2012; Holter, Svare and Egeland 2009). Saudi women have demonstrated the desire for success by taking on entrepreneurial roles (Abdalla, 2015; Al Ahmadi, 2011), but they remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in the public sector, which is the largest contributor to female employment in Saudi Arabia (Welsh et al., 2014). Saudi women represent 30% of the public sector workforce, but only 5% in the private sector (Gazzaz, 2017) and the proportion is much lower at senior managerial level (AccountAbility and Glowwork, 2017). There are two main reasons for this

discrepancy: restrictions as to the sectors in which women can be employed and the barriers to women's rise to leadership within those sectors.

From my own experience of working in a prestigious Saudi female university, I am aware of the significant barriers that Saudi women face in rising to top leadership positions in Saudi HEIs. Much research has been conducted relating to gender inequality in Saudi Arabia, so much so that Saudi Arabia has become a case in point for gender inequality research. Saudi society is patriarchal because of the persistence of tribal traditions. While in most countries economic growth has resulted in a reduction of gender inequality, the same cannot be said of Saudi Arabia. Despite high economic growth, the pace of reduction in gender inequality has not been at par with the world at large, probably because the main source of revenue was not based on labour but on natural resources. However, the Saudi government has realised to build a sustainable society it is essential to develop and utilise its human capital and in this respect the contribution of females is critical (AccountAbility and Glowork, 2017). Hence, the Saudi government has taken some very bold steps in building human capital among females.

As a result of these initiatives, the situation of women in leadership is beginning to change significantly. Above all, there is an increasingly open debate about women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Past research highlights the personal and cultural nature of many barriers to women's attainment of leadership positions in the Kingdom. Even many of the organisational and personal barriers are in some way linked with cultural traditions. However, most of such research was conducted before the current transition and as a result a significant part of it may no longer be relevant. Therefore, a new study which takes into consideration the impact of the current transition in Saudi Arabia is timely.

The full impact of Vision 2030 will take time to manifest itself. However, my personal interaction with colleagues in Saudi Arabian universities indicates that even at this early stage, the policy has started to influence the perceptions of females working in Saudi HEIs, who are becoming quite optimistic about the future of women's leadership in these institutions. This anecdotal evidence supported my opinion that new research was required to evaluate the barriers to leadership that women perceive to exist in Saudi HEIs.

1.6 Research objectives

The first and foremost objective of the study reported in this thesis is to evaluate the current status of women's leadership in Saudi HEIs and to understand its implications for the Saudi HE system. This involves determining what contributions women leaders can make to the system and how the lack of women leaders in Saudi HEIs affects the quality of that system.

The second objective is to identify the key barriers that Saudi women perceive as affecting their progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. Past research has categorised these as organisational, cultural and personal barriers, a categorisation which this thesis retains. Significant research has been conducted on these barriers in the context of Saudi women, but Vision 2030 and other developments in recent times have led to a dramatic shift in the Saudi cultural and organisational environment. This thesis, therefore, investigates which of these barriers continue to affect women leaders in Saudi HEIs.

The next objective of this thesis is to evaluate the perceived impact of Vision 2030 on the future of women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. In particular, it investigates how Vision 2030 has led to a change in women leaders' perception of the future state of the barriers that have affected women leaders in Saudi HEIs.

The fourth and final objective is to identify the possible policy solutions that the Saudi government could apply in order to lower the barriers to women leaders' progression in Saudi HEIs. Some policies may not have the desired impact if not designed properly. Having experienced the effects of past policy changes, women leaders in Saudi HEIs can comment on what kinds of policies the government should adopt in order to have the desired impact in this context.

1.7 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. This introduction has set out the research problem by discussing the need to understand the renaissance of Saudi women leaders, as explained by social, cultural and personal characteristics. It has described the crucial cultural and

political context in which contemporary Saudi women have struggled to achieve prominent positions of leadership.

The next chapter reviews the existing literature on women's leadership, with special emphasis on Saudi Arabia and HEIs. It begins the discussion with theories of leadership, then focuses on women leaders, considering the forms and types of leaders. It next examines the specific factors identified in the literature as affecting women in leadership positions. After this, it considers the remedial strategies to increase women's access to leadership roles and concludes with the findings of this critical review, which suggests the need to investigate further Saudi women's leadership as explained by organisational, cultural and personal characteristics.

Chapter 3 defines the conceptual framework arising from the critical review of the existing literature. The framework is formulated to achieve the research aim and objectives. It does so by deriving observable constructs from the available literature and further defines particular contextual constructs relevant to the experience of Saudi women. This is further refined by defining situational constructs relevant to their experience of achieving leadership positions in Saudi Arabia and their familial, social and cultural contexts.

Chapter 4 sets out the research methodology designed to investigate the research aim and objectives. It begins with a discussion of research epistemology and ontology, followed by the choice of mixed methodology for this study. It then discusses the use of interviews and a questionnaire survey for collecting data and the selection of the research sample.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the quantitative data. A statistical analysis of the questionnaire survey data is followed by a discussion of the results. Chapter 6 offers a qualitative and thematic analysis of the interview data, then Chapter 7 triangulates the findings of the questionnaire survey and interviews with the literature review. This discussion chapter considers how the findings compare with relevant past research and what new findings arising from the present study.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by drawing relevant conclusions from the research, identifying its implications and making suggestions for extending this research.

Chapter 2 Context – Saudi Arabia

2.1 Location, population and area

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was founded in 1926 and was formally united, as it stands today, in 1932. The Kingdom has traditionally been home to several tribes, and several aspects of this nomadic culture, such as high power distance, can still be witnessed in certain parts of the country. It remains a sacred site for billions of Muslims around the world (Alothaimeen, 2005). In 2013, the population of Saudi Arabia was about 29.9 million, of which Saudis comprised two thirds (20.27 million), whilst the non-Saudi population was 9.27 million (Ministry of Planning, 2013). One of the reasons for the high proportion of expats in Saudi Arabia has been Saudi Arabia's reliance on foreign labour, both skilled and unskilled (De Bel-Air, 2014). The Saudi government has undertaken policies such as the Saudisation of the labour force in order to reduce its reliance on foreign labour, and it is now focusing on modernising the Saudi workforce with the long-term objective of reducing reliance on foreign labour, especially in high-level and well-paid jobs (Sadi and Al-Buraey, 2009). In this respect, the government seems to have two strategic aims: to improve the skills of the Saudi labour force by modernising education and promoting education in STEM subjects, and to increase the participation of women in the workforce (Varshney, 2019). These twin objectives seem to form the core of labour reforms announced under the Vision 2030 plan. Some researchers argue that teachers have the most critical role to play in equipping students with 21st-century skills in STEM subjects (Atkinson and Mayo, 2010). The problem for countries like Saudi Arabia, therefore, is the lack of such skills due to historical trends of ignoring STEM subjects in the curriculum. The government is trying to bridge this gap by increasing STEM opportunities in education. The Ministry of Education has started revising school curricula to put more emphasis on STEM subjects (Madani, 2017; Almazroa & Al-Shamrani, 2015). One development in this regard is increased use of textbooks from international publishers such as McGraw Hill (Alghamdi & Al-salouli, 2013).

The government's Saudi Vision 2030 plan places special emphasis on development through youth education. It clearly specifies the significance of human resources, noting that

> …our real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our younger generation. They are our nation's pride and the architects of our future... Together

> we will continue building a better country, fulfilling our dream of prosperity and unlocking the talent, potential, and dedication of our young men and women. (Vision 2030, 2018)

One of the most significant components missing from the Saudi labour market is women. With a very low percentage of women entering the workforce due to various restrictions, the government has relied significantly on expatriates to bridge the labour market shortfall (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Women, constituting around half of the population, are a valuable addition to the national human capital; this is evident in the fact that most countries high on economic performance indicators are also those with the smallest gender gap in the workforce. This hints that reducing the gender gap in employment may lead to better economic performance (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Khuong and Chi, 2017). Developing this half of the workforce and providing them with the opportunities to realise their true potential will play a valuable role in the ambitious Vision 2030 project.

2.2 Economy and geography

In order to understand the current state of women in leadership in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to explore the history and origins of Saudi culture. Saudi Arabia was formed as an amalgamation of several tribes occupying the Arabian Peninsula, under the rule of King Abdulaziz. One of the conditions agreed upon at the time of its constitution was that the tribes could continue to follow their own traditions and culture. This virtual guarantee of non-interference of the state in social matters has allowed the continuation of many tribal practices from those times (Charrad, 2011). This is quite a significant aspect of this thesis, because some of the barriers to Saudi women's progress that past researchers have discussed stem directly or indirectly from these tribal traditions (Moghadam, 2014). The Saudi government has refrained from interfering in tribal traditions and as a result many old tribal traditions have remained in place in Saudi Arabia, despite the high level of modernisation throughout the global society (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

The nomadic Bedouin tribes from which the Saudi population is largely derived once lived a life focused on developing harmony with their environment and this continues to be

central to the lives of Saudis. The tribal system has merged over time with local culture and with religious beliefs based on Sharia principles, to the extent that religious and cultural elements are now inseparable in the Saudi context (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). People often wrongly perceive certain tribal traditions as originating from Sharia, resulting in strong opposition to many social reforms among the powerful *ulema* (Roded, 2008).

Fossil fuels remain the most significant contributor to the Saudi economy, along with some contribution from metal mining (World Bank, 2019). The continuous and significant income from fossil fuels has provided a cushioning effect to the Saudi Arabian economy and as a result, economic reforms, although desired, were not considered essential (Al Ghamdi, 2016). One of the consequences of this was a continuous delay in labour reforms such as improving the quality of the labour force, both in terms of demographic diversification and skill diversification. Using the income from fossil fuels, the Saudi government was able to compensate for the shortage of private-sector jobs by creating a sufficient number of well-paid public sector posts (Varshney, 2019). However, much has changed within the last decade or so, as pressure has been put on the Saudi economy by volatility in oil prices, a dearth of new public sector jobs and a growing population leading to a steep rise in demand for employment. These developments warrant an honest and immediate review of the economy and labour market (Varshney, 2019). The government's education programme aimed to provide scholarships for study in high-level foreign institutions in order that graduates would be employed by private sector companies, thus reducing the demand for public sector jobs. However, this has not materialised and demand for public sector jobs remain high.

The current Saudi government is not the first to have envisioned the diversification of the economy for long-term sustainability. Under the late King Fahd, there was a deliberate attempt to diversify the economy by reducing dependence on oil and promoting other industries such as manufacturing, IT and retail (Ministry of Information, 2009). The government took some notable steps, such as sponsoring Saudis to study in Western HEIs. It was expected that graduates from these world-class institutions would return with high-level skills which would catalyse the diversification of the Saudi economy. However, while this strategy resulted in positive outcomes, there was also the undesirable result that a large number of highly skilled and educated graduates pursued an insufficient supply of

jobs. The government attempted to manage the situation by announcing the Saudisation of the labour force, which required organisations to recruit a certain proportion of their workforce from among Saudi applicants. This has had a limited positive impact and the unemployment rate has continued to rise steadily among Saudi youth, not because there are too few jobs overall, but because too few of them are seen as desirable by young Saudis. The government realises that it must create new job opportunities and increase local participation in the workforce for the sustainability of the national economy. The recently announced Vision 2030 is a notable and concrete step in this direction. According to Alston (2017),

> Vision 2030 recognizes that Saudi women represent 'a great asset' which is currently under-utilized, and the need to recognize women's rights points in the same direction. The 2012 decision allowing women to work in the retail sector transformed the lives of millions of women who were finally able to work. So too should the current economic transformation lift existing restrictions on women's economic and other independence. (p.91)

The purpose is to equip the younger generation with skills in different areas so as to make them more employable for local and international businesses, while also reducing the burden on the state's resources. By doing this, the Saudi government aims to diversify the skill base of locals in order to promote the development of more diversified businesses. It also aims to attract foreign companies to set up in Saudi Arabia and provide jobs for skilled local workers. The current volatility in oil prices, along with gloomy predictions for future prices, underscores the value of this proactive diversification strategy (McKinsey, 2017).

2.3 Education in Saudi Arabia

Until recently, the education policies of the Kingdom remained heavily influenced by Shariah principles and focused on social sciences rather than on STEM subjects. The education system was designed principally as a social service, with school curricula focusing on religious (Islamic) studies, social science and administrative studies (Alwedinani, 2016). This did not prove challenging for the government for a long time, because a significant proportion of graduates were employed in the public sector, where knowledge of STEM

subjects was not essential. However, with an overburdened public service, the government is now looking for an increase in private sector employment among Saudi youth.

It can be seen that the secondary system focused on developing skills for employment in the public sector, as a result of which it was by far the largest employer of Saudi nationals, with a much smaller proportion employed in the private sector. The public sector was also attractive for Saudis because of higher pay, better working conditions (i.e. a lighter workload) and better job stability. It did, however, put pressure on the government to continue creating jobs to support the growing population and new employees entering the workforce (Alwedinani, 2016). Government policy in the last decade has been to alter this composition to increase the participation of locals in the private sector. In particular, the government is shifting its focus towards increasing student participation in STEM subjects, making graduates more suitable for private-sector employment (Varshney, 2019).

Under Vision 2030 (2018), the Saudi government has stressed the need to increase STEM courses for both boys and girls in order to create a more competitive workforce which will be employed in private sector. Previous royal decrees allowed equal access to education (MOE, 2008), but gender-based segregation remained, as all Saudi HEIs are single-gender. The result of this segregation was that most females chose subjects in social sciences, whilst most of the scientific subjects were dominated by male learners. Due to their relative lack of participation in STEM courses, women were deprived of high growth jobs in the private sector.

Education policy in the KSA is overseen by four bodies: the Ministry of Education, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, the Ministry of Higher Education and the military colleges for the armed forces (MOE, 2008). While religious scholars have no official role in formulating education policy, they have always had a strong say in such matters. Furthermore, the Saudi government has always adopted a non-confrontational approach towards the *ulema*, which has thus traditionally had a strong influence on national education policy. In particular, the *ulema* has been strongly opposed to high quality education (such as in STEM subjects) for women, which is one of the reasons why female education has not received the same level of attention and support as that of men; for example, in the introduction of high-demand STEM courses. It is only now that the Saudi government has started formulating policies independent of the influence of religious

scholars and consequently that some parity is being achieved in education for men and women. Still, the gap remains significant and will take some time to bridge.

Currently, there are 300 HE colleges for women in Saudi Arabia. Women account for approximately 57% of the total number of students in Saudi Arabian universities and more than 20% of students benefitting from overseas scholarship programmes (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). These percentages are expected to increase in the coming years because of the establishment of many new universities throughout Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The opening of large women's universities, such as Princess Noura University in 2007, and the introduction of gender-mixed education at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in 2009 have increased women's opportunities to access higher education (Al-Fassi, 2010; Batrawy, 2013). Forty-four thousand Saudi women graduate from universities every year, far outpacing their male counterparts (Doumato, 2010). Women also constitute 79% of PhD awards each year (Doumato, 2010), indicating their willingness to pursue professional development. However, considering the shortage of degree courses in STEM subjects for Saudi women, most PhDs by Saudi females are in non-STEM subjects. This means that although there is a steady supply of female professors for Saudi HEIs, most if not all of these are qualified in non-STEM subjects. There is, however, a rise in Saudi females pursuing degrees in STEM subjects, both at home and abroad. This is likely to improve the situation in years to come, but there will still need to be a significant shift upwards in this trend to bridge the gap created by decades of neglect in this respect.

Saudi women have outperformed Saudi men in tertiary education, with 37% of Saudi female graduates obtaining postgraduate degrees, compared to only 23% of men (Hausmann et al., 2011). This has also led to some improvement in their social standards, as is evident in the rise in average age of first marriage and a reduction in cases of polygamy in Saudi Arabia (Ertürk, 2009). While women's education has improved significantly in terms of numbers, however, the quality of education has not enjoyed the same level of improvement (Al-Fassi, 2010). This has been exacerbated by gender segregation; while Saudi government has increased emphasis on education in STEM subjects, most of this focus is diverted towards all-male institutions (Ertürk, 2009).

Even the deans of most Saudi female universities are males, one notable exception being the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, which was the first Saudi university to appoint a female rector (Almansour and Kempner, 2016) and which is also staffed entirely by women (Al-Sudairy, 2017; Meijer, 2010). King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is the only mixed-gender university in the Kingdom (Ministry of Education, 2017). One notable and encouraging development for women's education is the King Abdullah Sponsorship Programme, which allows Saudi males and females to pursue higher education in foreign universities (Taylor and Albasri, 2014). This is expected to help somewhat in bridging the gap in supply and demand for STEM courses among female students. In 2015, around 50,000 Saudi females were studying abroad (Ministry of Education, 2019) and in 2017, over 5000 were pursuing PhD studies in foreign institutions (Ministry of Education Statistics Centre, 2017). While Saudi women have thus made significant progress in terms of numbers in higher education (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010; Varshney, 2013; Islam, 2014; Khan and Parveen, 2014), there has been no significant rise in the number of women in leadership positions.

2.4 Status of women in Saudi Arabian society

Leadership opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia are influenced significantly by their overall positioning in the societal structure. It is important to understand the social status of women in Saudi Arabia because of its significant impact on their education, career prospects and consequently their opportunities for educational leadership. Investigating women's status also highlights the barriers and challenges that they face in achieving leadership positions and making progress (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The perspectives and practices of any society and its people influence the empowerment of women in that society. Similarly, their status and position in society significantly affect their status and position in the economic and political spheres (Le Renard, 2014). The male-dominated and patriarchal society of Saudi Arabia has many historical influences and cultural restrictions that affect women's progress, empowerment and participation in leadership positions.

The position of women in Saudi Arabian society is strongly influenced by the social culture, so in order to understand their position, it is important to examine the prevailing historical, political and socio-economic conditions. Saudi Arabia is a deeply conservative nation, where religion and gender politics are inextricably linked (Hodges, 2017). This has created a tension between the state and the *ulama* regarding the position and situation of women (Alsuwaida, 2016).

The current status of women in Saudi society stems from its tribal traditions as well as Islamic beliefs. According to Al-Ahmadi (2011), "the cultures and customs of the tribal community prevailing in the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam have contributed to the conservative orientation towards women in Islam" (p. 152), especially in terms of allowing women to make decisions. In old tribal structures, men were the sole decision makers whilst women, considered weak and less able, were mainly assigned follower roles. It has also been found that substantial segmentation of the different Arab societies has placed women in a passive role in the family and at work. The men who dominate society interpret Islam and Islamic laws to impose and maintain limitations on women. The significant gender gap has created a power imbalance whereby most decisions, even those related to women, are made by men, who sometimes have little or no knowledge of the issues that women face (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). This has led to a sustained and significant overlooking of human development issues related to women. For example, despite the hostile environment, women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to drive until very recently and this significantly affected their mobility and ability to live independently. Male members of the family were expected to accompany women to most places and were therefore in a position to make most of the decisions.

Gender inequality has been found to exist in the Arabian Peninsula in general, forming a significant obstacle for women in pursuit of their rights and freedoms (Hodges, 2017). Despite their continued efforts, significant gender inequality persists in a society that is influenced by a culture of dependence and laws requiring every woman, regardless of age, to have a male as her guardian (Alyaemni et al., 2013). The recent relaxation of male guardianship restrictions on travel and employment, for example, leave unchanged the historical and cultural perspectives on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in a society that has traditionally treated women as weak and dependent on their male

relatives. This historical thinking has restricted women from reaching their full potential in terms of their position in society (Syed et al., 2018). Despite the relaxation of male guardianship laws, there remains a culture where male guardianship remains quite prevalent as a cultural practice. For example, until recently women required the permission of their male guardians to seek hospital treatment and despite a 2017 royal decree relaxing any such requirements, hospitals violating this decree faced no legal repercussions.

The position and status of women in Saudi Arabia is a very complex topic that received no significant attention until the economic development of the country in the 1970s, when oil revenues introduced some major changes associated with social, economic and political factors (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). The economic revolution brought changes in lifestyle and thinking, with an increasing trend of receiving education from abroad and many other social and structural changes. Rapidly increasing wealth had a major impact on Saudi Arabian society and greater attention began to be paid to issues associated with women's rights, responsibilities and liberties (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). On one hand, the rise in income led to socio-economic development, which was accompanied by better education and demand for greater gender equality in the Kingdom. On the other, a rise in oil income led to economic prosperity, which suppressed the need for women to work in order to support their families. The result was that these contradictory pressures nullified each other, maintaining the status quo. Thus, although economic improvement strengthened women's education, it did not result in a comparable rise in their participation in the labour market.

The masculinity of Saudi Arabian culture is evident in the power imbalance which affects multiple aspects of the personal and social lives of women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). According to Rajkhan (2014), "many Saudi women and men consider women's nature to be different from that of men; therefore, they are not allowed to work in the same jobs as men. That is why only certain jobs (i.e., teaching and nursing as opposed to engineering) are open to women" (p. 7). The gender-based power allocation is reinforced by the laws of the country, as well as by its governmental and social structures (Alamri, 2011). One of the negative outcomes of these power imbalances is the extremely low participation of women in science and technology. Their weak representation in leadership has made it even more difficult for women to raise concerns regarding their education and broader position in

society (Alamri, 2011). Only those women who pursued such courses through foreign institutions were able to achieve these qualifications (Alyaemni et al., 2013). The Vision 2030 initiative represents a significant step towards eliminating many of these restrictions, but its impact is yet to be evaluated.

Saudi women's employment opportunities are limited by the application of gender segregation, which is derived from the generally accepted interpretation of Islam in Saudi society (Le Renard, 2014), leading to the extensive imposition of separate public spaces for women, where they cannot be seen by men (Rajkhan, 2014). Women's roles and responsibilities are framed according to Islamic teachings and Islamic law. The male guardianship law, which was relaxed in August 2019 (BBC, 2019), is considered one of the strongest norms in Saudi Arabia and a major restriction on its women (Tønnessen, 2016). It has been mainly seen as a barrier to women pursuing higher education in certain fields or seeking education from international universities. Removal of this oppressive law will lift a major obstacle for Saudi women, as they will be able to pursue interests of their choice without depending on the approval of their male guardians (Tønnessen, 2016).

Rajkhan (2014) argues that women's situation in Saudi Arabia is wrongly ascribed to Islamic teaching, which does not, in fact, require the imposition of the restrictions discussed here. Thus, the prevailing gender inequalities arise not from Islam but from tribal traditions which were enacted to support a particular way of tribal life in old times (Rajkhan, 2014). However, they are still obvious in different aspects of social life because these traditions have been institutionalised and interwoven in society in ways that make them impervious to individual action. In the past, even the government faced resistance against any change in the status quo from orthodox sections of Saudi society (Varshney, 2019).

However, to understand recent social developments, it is important to focus on women's achievements in higher education and in attaining leadership positions. The key to social development can only be measured with the development of women in society. This implies that Saudi Arabian women must devise their own strategies to challenge inequality and achieve justice (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Saudi women have traditionally enjoyed limited decision-making power. More generally, they are significantly excluded from participating in society, from making decisions and from enjoying basic rights such as freedom of movement (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Thus,

women's historical status explains certain aspects of their current position in Saudi Arabian society, which differs from their status in other Islamic countries in that Saudi society is more conservative in its interpretation of their rights and freedoms. Women in Islamic countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, for example, have full access to education and are permitted to work with their male counterparts (Srimulyani, 2012). Since 2018 a transition has been underway in Saudi Arabia, spearheaded by the Saudi government and resulting in a gradual easing of several restrictions that have affected Saudi women. This transition has not been captured in the existing academic literature, although many recent online articles provide a clear insight into ongoing changes with respect to women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia (see, for example, Ensor, 2019; France24, 2019; Said, 2019). However, critics of these reforms argue that they are less extensive than they appear (Oppenheim, 2019). Regulations such as the male guardianship laws allow the state to intervene in the private lives of women and male relatives may use them to control the lives of their female relatives. The announcement of the relaxation of some of these laws has been welcomed in certain quarters, but many remain sceptical about whether such declarations will result in any real or meaningful change (Alhussein, 2019).

Lack of control over their personal lives and decision making restricts women from making effective choices related to their lives, education and careers. Cultural norms, traditional beliefs and practices within the community restrict their career advancement, especially to leadership roles (Arar, 2017). Women were historically excluded from work and independent travel, and such restrictions prevail to some extent, despite significant advances in the field of education; in short, women's status remains very low in the thinking of men (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The restrictions imposed on women by Saudi Arabian culture are evident in various studies that have found them to be locked in traditional gender roles which prevent them from exercising their ability and skills in the economic development of the country, thus further denying them opportunities to achieve leadership positions (Alwedinani, 2016). In short, there is abundant evidence that the women of Saudi Arabia are not given equal rights to education, employment and progress to good positions in the business world, in contrast to their counterparts in other countries including the USA (Arar, 2017; Hodges, 2017; Kassem, 2012). Alwedinani (2016) conducted her PhD research on how gender affects subject choice among higher education students

in Saudi Arabia. Using 100 semi-structured interviews with Saudi female students and lecturers, she concluded that the internalisation of gender norms and gender stereotypes shape Saudi women's views and attitudes towards these subjects. Furthermore, she found that Saudi women tend to take one of three approaches to dealing with the patriarchal system: bargaining, resisting and negotiating.

This section has shown how the power relations of a patriarchal society significantly affect women and their career advancement. The next turns to the legal system in Saudi Arabia and its effects on women's empowerment.

2.5 Saudi women and the law

2.5.1 The Saudi legal system

The Saudi Arabian legal system is based on Shariah principles, but these were often arbitrarily interpreted in cases to which they had no direct reference, so in 1992 the Basic Law of Governance was enacted (Al-Fahad, 2005). However, this was not a significant departure from the status quo, as Article 1 states that Quran and Sunna will remain the main guiding principles for managing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in all respects (van Eijk, 2010).

One way in which Saudi Arabia differs markedly from other Muslim states is that these guiding Shariah principles are not codified, so that courts generally enjoy greater autonomy from the state than in other Muslim states. The Saudi legal system also differs from those of the West in that judges are not hampered by being required to follow judicial precedent but have the sole discretionary power to decide in every case:

> According to classical Islamic doctrine, a judge (*qadi*) has a religious duty to settle a dispute brought before him: in each individual case, he is allowed to use independent interpretation (*ijtihad*) in order to find the most desirable solution. He may disregard previous judgements, either his own or those of other judges, in this process. (Yamani, 2008, p.39)

Judges are thus expected to be aware of the guiding principles of the Quran and Sunna and to use their knowledge to adjudicate each new case irrespective of the outcomes of past similar cases (Vogel, 2000). Virtually identical cases may, therefore, have radically different outcomes, as the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna may vary from one judge to another. This exercise of great discretionary authority makes it extremely difficult to predict outcomes of court cases in Saudi Arabia, leading to a non-uniform judicial system (Vogel, 2000; Van Eijk, 2010). One of the things that must be noted in this context is that the judges need to know the Quran and Sunna, as all legal cases must be decided according to their guiding principles. This means that all judges will be religious scholars, basically leading to a society which is driven solely by religious principles and tribal traditions. This is one of the reasons why women have failed to achieve full freedom in the Kingdom; they cannot challenge any of the gender-related biases, as the courts are most likely to rule in favour of men.

Article 5 of the 1992 Basic Law of Governance reasserts the status of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a monarchy with the King exercising ultimate authority over all political matters. He can enact new laws through royal decrees, but these are called regulations rather than laws because the law is governed only by the Quran and Sunna. Therefore, judges can overrule a royal decree if in their opinion it contradicts the Quran and Sunna, so "royal decrees do not play any direct role in courts" (Vikør, 2005, p. 267). Judges generally consider decrees part of the political process and may or may not refer to them in passing judgement. The supreme authority of the King, however, gives him the power to dismiss cases and pardon convicts. In 1962 a decision was made to ensure that the Shariah courts would follow royal decrees, but in reality, these are not seen as binding, because most *ulama* scholars consider the Quran and Sunna to be supreme and there is also a general willingness in the ruling class not to challenge anything related to religious principles. In order to ensure the legitimacy of the existing system, the King and the *ulama* council generally tend to avoid conflicts, at least in public. The downside of such an arrangement is that any reforms can be blocked arbitrarily at implementation; for example, the royal decree relaxing male guardianship for medical purposes was not implemented, with hospitals continuing to ask women to demonstrate their male guardians' approval for the medical care they may seek. This situation, where the government passes laws for

women's empowerment but these are not implemented in practice, has often been criticised as mere eyewash (Oppenheim, 2019; Alhussein, 2019). Indeed, it remains to be seen whether the recently announced relaxation of the male guardianship laws will have any meaningful impact on the lives of women (Oppenheim, 2019).

There has been an intense debate around modernisation of Saudi society, much of it focused on the pace of modernisation rather than the need for it. An issue which remains strongly contested between those in favour of and against modernisation is that of women's rights (van Geel, 2012). While successive governments have tried to gradually but surely adopt a more liberal stance on women's rights, their efforts have been strongly resisted by the *ulama*, whose members cite the Quran and Sunna in their arguments. Although the legislative innovations related to women sought by the government may not be radical, many religious scholars see them as setting a precedent for more sweeping reforms and therefore strongly resist any such changes, no matter how small. Furthermore, since the *ulama* members, sitting as judges, have the wide-ranging freedom of action described above, no legislative reforms can ultimately be imposed. This is the main problem in seeking to reform women's rights because, in the absence of a unified legal code, the judges' scriptural interpretation supersedes the authority of royal decrees.

According to Syed et al. (2018), most of the legislation regarding discrimination against women lies within personal status law, which addresses issues related to marriage, custody, inheritance and divorce, whereas the key reforms passed in Saudi Arabia in relation to women's rights concern education. When King Faisal originally proposed these changes, they were strongly opposed by the *ulama*, despite the King's popularity among them, because they felt that Western-style education would undermine the principles of Muslim family life by corrupting the minds of girls. However, several high-profile personalities supported the King and claimed that these reforms would mean that many girls who were then travelling to neighbouring countries such as Syria and Egypt for education would be able to be educated in the KSA. King Faisal was able to use his rapport with the *ulama* members to convince them that schooling girls would make them better followers of Islam by improving their religious education. The *ulama* duly agreed to the establishment of girls' schools, which later led to demands for higher education for women in order to train the female teachers required to staff them (Van Geel, 2012). The success

of education reforms illustrates the vital importance of the support of the *ulama*, whereas the lack of such support has proved to be the major stumbling block to the introduction of reforms related to the wider empowerment of women and the abolition of laws underpinning female oppression (Wilkinson, 2014).

The campaign to abolish male guardianship laws has been ongoing for several years but had not until recently received the level of media coverage and support enjoyed by other similar campaigns, such as that to allow women to drive (HRW, 2016). In 2014, Saudi campaigners formally appealed to the Shura Council to consider abolishing the male guardianship laws and to take "serious measures to protect women's rights and stop domestic violence" (Harbi, 2014). The new leadership, working largely under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has recently made progress in this regard; it has managed to introduce changes, such as the introduction of cinemas and entertainment, while lifting the ban on women driving, all with the consent of the *ulama*. This has strengthened confidence among the supporters of women's rights that the Saudi Arabian government is finally paying attention to the issue of discrimination against women. Prior to these reforms, limits to the employment of women in certain sectors had in turn limited their choice of field of study. Furthermore, arbitrary restrictions on women's growth have affected their willingness to seek employment opportunities.

Despite some scepticism towards the government's approach, there is consensus that the Crown Prince's Vision 2030 initiative does indeed aim to address some of the women's rights issues that have remained untouched by reforms since the inception of the Kingdom. Even its critics believe that the government has at least identified these issues as having stalled the progress of the human rights situation in the country, although they remain unsure whether it can implement all of its intended reforms against the wishes of the *ulama* (Oppenheim, 2019).

2.5.2 The Saudi legal system and women's rights

There are several other Muslim states, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Kuwait, where some gender segregation occurs; however, it is applied more strictly in

the KSA than in any of these (Doumato, 2010; Meijer, 2010). Past researchers have found this to be a significant cultural and organisational barrier to women's rise to leadership in Saudi Arabia (Hodges, 2017; AlDoubi, 2014). While women do have some culturally defined roles in other Muslim states, restrictions such as prohibition from interacting with unknown males are practiced in Saudi Arabia alone. In this respect, it can be said that the Saudi system follows a somewhat stricter interpretation of Islam than that of other countries based on Shariah law (Vassiliev, 1997). Some scholars argue that the practice of segregation has no origins in traditional Islamic culture but can somehow be linked to a particularly conservative view of Islam and to developments in the Kingdom such as the exploitation of natural resources and rapid urbanisation (al-Khateeb, 2007; Ali, 2000). Van Geel (2012) states that such practices were adopted to limit the struggle for power and control to men. If so, this seems to have been a deliberate misinterpretation of Islamic principles (Abukari, 2014).

A report of the UN Commission on Human Rights (2012) states:

> Saudi Arabia is suffering from gender apartheid. The cornerstone of this patriarchal abuse is the male guardianship system. Guardianship removes women's ability to make decisions, thus ensuring their subjugation. The male guardian – whether the father, brother, husband or even son – undertakes the decision-making regarding matters of the body, health, marriage, and travel. This violates fundamental human rights and enables violence against women. (p. 112)

After years of deliberation, the Saudi government has finally started relaxing the male guardianship laws to give women more freedom and control of their lives. Any changes resulting from such reforms will take time to show their effects, because they will require a change in culture. Nevertheless, this is probably one of the most notable steps taken by the Saudi government towards women's empowerment since the introduction of education for girls, because the guardianship laws unfairly deprived women of a normal independent life (Harbi, 2014) and because the orthodox sections of society were always likely to be strongly opposed to reforms in this direction.

Saudi Arabia is not yet party to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but it implements several of their principles. Of

note is the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),[1] Article 1 of which forbids

> …any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

The most interesting aspect of this statement is that it makes gender-based discrimination illegal in both public and private spheres. In countries like Saudi Arabia, governments have preferred not to interfere in the private sphere, even though some critics argue that through its gender-biased laws, the Saudi government exercises direct interference in the private lives of its residents (Alhussein, 2019). The reluctance of the government to disrupt the status quo is one of the main reasons why many of the laws have stood over time in the Kingdom, despite being considered irrelevant in most countries of the world (Alhussein, 2019).

However, in the period prior to Vision 2030, women faced discrimination even in the public sphere, as they were rarely considered for top leadership positions. Neumayer (2007) reports that Saudi Arabia's ratification of CEDAW in 2000 was acknowledged as a positive step towards the improvement of human rights in the country, but the high hopes quickly vanished because in many cases when CEDAW was in conflict with Shariah principles, it was the latter which were given precedence (McCrudden, 2015). Saudi Arabia ratified CEDAW with the reservation that it would apply its provisions as long as they were not in conflict with Shariah principles. Interestingly, even practices which have no reference in Shariah, such as male guardianship, have been difficult to remove, probably because of the strong perceptual overlap between Saudi tribal traditions and Shariah.

McCrudden (2015) contends that the major issue is that CEDAW depends on the European Convention on Human Rights, which itself is not universal, thus questioning the universal application of CEDAW. On viewing the matter through the lens of cultural relativism, it is evident that the European Convention of Human Rights considers men and women to be

[1]Royal Decree No. M/25 of 25/5/1421 AH

equal, whereas certain cultures, such as that of Saudi Arabia, do not. In fact, certain critics argue that CEDAW is "one of the most political of all universal human rights conventions" (Rehof, 1993, p.7). Indeed, it is one of the leading contenders among international conventions in terms of the number of reservations received, which stands at 57.[2]

Saudi Arabia has adopted CEDAW in that there has been some degree of liberalisation of the treatment of women; for example, they can participate in municipal elections and carry out business and social activities, but all of these must be done while bearing in mind the prevailing Saudi culture and traditions. Thus, whilst a woman can run and operate a business, there may be reservations regarding her interactions with unrelated men, even if these are her clients. In this respect, Saudi culture and customs become hurdles to the full implementation of conventions like CEDAW.

Through his Vision 2030 initiative, the Crown Prince is looking to tackle many issues related to women's rights, including male guardianship, female driving, gender segregation and religious policing. However, he faces strong challenges from certain quarters, such as conservative elements, who question whether such reforms will lead to a culture that is noncompliant with Shariah (Alhussein, 2019). Nevertheless, Alhussein (2019) contends that the Saudi government has gone ahead with some groundbreaking reforms under Vision 2030 and that Saudi Arabia is on the path to achieving gender equality, at least at the legal and institutional levels.

2.6 Political representation of women in Saudi Arabia

One of the key obstacles to women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia has been their relative lack of participation in decision making at the policy level (Yamani, 2004). Notwithstanding recent developments, it remains true that "in a society where women constitute the majority of the population and account for more university graduates than men, they have few of the rights that most of Western society usually grants" (Pejman, 2004, p.37). Lack

[2] *Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary-General*, available online at http://untreaty.un.org.

of political participation at the policy level means that issues related to women are not often discussed in the political arena (Yamani, 2004).

Women's exclusion from participation in this regard is evident from the fact most of the efforts to improve female empowerment in the Saudi context have been on issues that may not be of as much significance in terms of improving women's quality of life. For example, the issues of political participation and male guardianship have not tended to receive much attention, while the wearing of the *abaya* and the right to drive have been exaggerated in importance (Pejman, 2004). Lack of political participation means that men make most of the policy decisions regarding women; furthermore, their decisions are heavily influenced by the opinions of the *ulema*. With little at stake, these male policymakers easily succumb to the pressure exerted by clerics and as a result, the situation of women in Saudi Arabia has remained the same for a long period of time (Al-Dabbagh, 2008). This has led to a culture where even those men and women who do not agree with the conservative principles of Saudi culture tend to follow them for fear of pubic shaming. Even the Saudi leadership, which was looking to change the status quo, encountered strong opposition from the conservative sections of society, some of which are extremely powerful, especially in political terms.

Saudi Arabian men, in political and religious circles, have created a cultural image of ideal womanhood which specifies the manner in which a supposedly ideal woman should live and behave. The traditional perspective forces women to live by this ideal image, as it seeks to "protect its tribal family from Western influences and challenges to patriarchal control during times of social change" (Doumato, 1995, p. 91). For example, an ideal woman can be one who is educated to a high level and competes with men in all respects, but in the case of Saudi Arabia, a woman who abides by the restrictions placed on her is considered to embody the ideal. Professional leadership is therefore seen as inappropriate for such women, because it would require them to compromise their familial responsibilities. According to Jamjoom and Kelly (2013), there is a satisfactory emphasis on higher education for women. Their study concludes that Saudi Arabia is working towards increasing the level of education and that women are generally considered to be more disciplined and dedicated to success in education. However, they are expected to use education for self-development purposes only and not to facilitate employment. Hence,

most women are confined to jobs which are considered morally correct for them, as teachers and medical professionals.

Saudi Arabia formalised its social, political and economic systems around 1932, when several competing tribes decided to come together under the rule of the Al Saud family (Library of Congress, 2006). The societal structure formed at this time was based largely on gender discrimination (AlDoubi, 2014). Under this system, women were deprived of most of their roles in the public sphere and were confined to the private sphere, i.e. the home (AlDoubi, 2014).

Al-Rawi (2014) identifies a major issue in women's liberation in Saudi Arabia: that power has remained in the hands of strong politico-religious groups which have institutionalised and enshrined in law a range of oppressive social conventions and localised traditions relating to women. The restrictions placed on women were "seen as compromises to the centralizing state's quest for modernization, which entailed urbanization, mobility, and growth in nuclear households, all of which constituted threats to the pre-existing patriarchal extended family structure" (Doumato, 2000, p. 34).

Al-Dabbagh (2008) states that "in the case of Saudi Arabia, the gender ideology promoted in the political culture idealizes women's domesticity, elevates sex-segregation, and is intimately tied to the ideologies that legitimate the monarchy" (p. 3). This ideology promotes gender segregation in all aspects of life; for example, men are expected to do only certain types of job, while women are restricted to certain others. There is little, if any, overlap in the roles and responsibilities of men and women (Al-Dabbagh 2008).

Recent developments, especially since the arrival of the internet and new forms of media, have empowered Saudi women to some extent. They engage collectively in discussions, study a range of subjects and seek jobs which were once considered off-limits for them. However, they are still bound by the tradition of Saudi Arabian gender ideology, which is claimed to be based on the authenticity and supremacy of religion and culture (Al Alhareth et al., 2015; AlDoubi, 2014).

Among other positive signs for Saudi women is that the government has paid increasing attention to the issue of their empowerment. One such step was the organising of a

particular session dedicated to women's rights during the 2003 National Dialogue.[3] This did not lead to any consensus, but it did mark the beginning of a long-awaited debate on women's empowerment.

In 2004, two women were elected to the board of the Chamber of Commerce (Al-Dabbagh, 2008). Progress then slowed somewhat before the next breakthrough in 2009, when Nora bint Abdullah al-Fayez was appointed Deputy Education Minister, the first female Saudi Arabian minister (CAFAmerica, 2010).

Women were subsequently granted the right to participate in municipal elections by a royal decree of 2011. This major reform also gave women the right to be appointed to the Consultative Council (AlDoubi, 2014). This decree became a reality on January 12, 2013. King Abdullah reformed the Consultative Council by appointing thirty Saudi women as members, making a total of 150 members (120 of them male) for a new four-year term. He declared that women should henceforth have at least twenty per cent of seats in the Council. The thirty women appointed included academics, human rights activists and two princesses (Saudi Gazette, 2013, January, para. 4). Two of these women were Dr Thuraya Obeid, who served as executive director of the UN Development Programme, and Dr Hayat Sindi, who was the first Saudi woman to attain a PhD in biotechnology and was listed among Newsweek's "150 women who shake the world" in 2012 (Saudi Gazette, 2013, January, paras. 5-6). While this was a notable development for Saudi women, there remained some degree of segregation, as the female councillors had to use separate entrances and office spaces (Atwan, 2015). However, they were allowed to participate in council meetings without any gender segregation (Eldoseri and Al-Sadah, 2013). Developments such as this are critical steps towards achieving gender equality in Saudi society.

Women's political participation is essential to the raising of issues of women's rights. For example, Al-Dubais (2018) reports that some female members of the Shura Council, such as Latifah Al-Shalaan and Moudi Al-Khalaf, have raised the issue of the wide gender pay gap, which violates the labour laws operated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. Such issues which affect women are most likely to be raised by women only,

[3]Riyadh Declaration on Human Rights in Peace and War, adopted at the Human Rights in Peace and War Conference held in Riyadh, 14-15th October 2003, para 3.

because history indicates that male decision-makers have remained largely oblivious to female-related issues. Thus, the presence of women in the Shura Council promotes women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, which further supports the case for their representation in decision-making bodies. However, the progress of such reforms has been too slow to achieve any meaningful change (AlDoubi, 2014).

While the process of political empowerment of women has been quite slow, there has nonetheless been some progress and Khan (2016) predicts that the implementation of Vision 2030 will eventually lead to adequate representation of women in political circles, which will, in turn, allow them to highlight the issues which seriously affect their human rights in the KSA. The primary reason for this wave of reforms to have generated more optimism than any previous reforms in the Kingdom is that for the first time, the government is taking steps to directly challenge the level of authority that religious and orthodox forces in society exercise over social reforms. As mentioned before, the primary factor slowing reforms under previous governments was not their own reluctance to promote them, but rather the resistance of the powerful *ulema*. In addition, the previous governments were reluctant to alter the status quo within the Kingdom whereby clerics were given a significant degree of political power.

This section has identified the main socio-cultural and other environmental factors affecting Saudi women, especially in terms of their right to live independently. The next reviews the existing literature on the topic of Saudi women and leadership, with particular reference to higher education.

2.7 Women and leadership in Saudi Arabian HEIs

2.7.1 Women's employment in Saudi Arabia

It has been found that Saudi Arabia is the Arab country with the lowest participation rate of women in the labour force, at only 9.2 per cent. Given that women represent half of the total population, it is clear that the country is not effectively using this human resource to enhance its economic achievements (Alfarran, 2016). According to the reports of the World Economic Forum and the UN, Saudi Arabia—and indeed, the whole Arab world—is considered to be underperforming economically. A significant explanation for this failure

to reach its economic potential is believed to be the poor participation of women in economic activity, including employment. Despite concerted efforts to encourage the inclusion of women and their economic empowerment, many social, traditional, cultural and policy-related provisions pose barriers to their empowerment (Al-bakr et al., 2017).

Some Saudi women have enjoyed career success, as illustrated by labour force statistics which show an increase from 14% in 1990 to 21% in 2016 in women's employment (World Economic Forum, 2016), albeit in a limited range of domains, as Saudi women are predominantly restricted to careers in sectors such as healthcare and education (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). To overcome the limited career choices available, many Saudi women pursue success through entrepreneurship (Azzam, 1996; Welsh et al., 2014).

Various initiatives have been taken by the government, international organisations and female activists to enhance the skills of women, to promote their knowledge and to improve their self-confidence to participate effectively in the economy (HRW, 2016). It has been reported that the number of women in the KSA labour force tripled between 1992 and 2010, thanks largely to the high concentration of women employed in the fields of teaching and administration, in both schools and HEIs.

It was earlier found that 93% of the female university graduates in 2007 had degrees in education and the humanities (Almunajjed, 2010). The shortage of jobs in the field of education has also resulted in women seeking jobs outside the country. The restricted choices of subject and limited encouragement to work in other fields resulted in more than 300 women taking up teaching jobs in Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain (Almunajjed, 2010). Other studies have found that women are being employed in the public sector, but mainly in education and administration, and that their employment status is influenced by the labour laws of the country (Alfarran, 2016). Although the participation of women in the workforce has increased over the years, the limited opportunities to work in a male-dominated society mean that very few women are able to have successful careers, despite holding higher education degrees.

It also follows that the very low participation of women in the workforce will be reflected in very poor prospects of gaining leadership positions. Saudi Arabia's HE system has failed to prepare women to take competitive roles in the labour force (Alamri, 2011). Among unemployed women in Saudi Arabia, more than 1000 have a doctorate (Almunajjed, 2010).

Besides the cultural and religious restrictions alluded to above, there is a very significant problem of voluntary unemployment which reduces the participation of women in the workforce. This occurs when an educated person chooses to be unemployed rather than accept the lower-paid jobs in teaching and other services which are relatively readily available but not commensurate with their qualifications and potential (Almunajjed, 2010). By reducing women's participation in the labour force, such voluntary unemployment will have the consequence of further limiting the number of women leaders.

2.7.2 Women and leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia

Whelan (2009) concludes that students' achievements in educational institutions depend significantly on leadership and management in those institutions. Northhouse and Lee (2018) claim that leaders in HEIs, just like those in schools, affect the quality of education delivered there through their strategies, policies and practices. Hallinger and Heck (1996) assert that research regarding a principal's leadership has hardly any meaning if it does not relate to the context of the educational institution. In the same vein, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999, p.4) argue that excellent leadership is characterised by "superb sensitivity to contexts in which it functions." Sensitivity to context means that leaders should know what kind of leadership approach will work in their institution. In this respect, researchers should look at the context of the educational institutions while investigating the leadership approaches followed there. This signifies the benefits of the effective representation of women in leadership in HEIs.

The current body of literature overwhelmingly supports the view that women are severely underrepresented in leadership positions in Saudi Arabian organisations. However, despite the abundance of this literature, the existing research lacks in many respects, leading Abalkhail (2017) to argue that very little is known about women in leadership in Saudi Arabia. The existing body of research focuses on stereotyped images of Saudi women such as victims of oppression (Shannon, 2014), which represents only a partial truth about their lives. For example, recent developments have increased the numbers of foreign-educated Saudi women, but the current literature does not highlight this high level of literacy among them. Saudi Arabia is a unique case in that it has a strong mix of modernism with

traditionalism and conservatism (Gorney, 2016), creating an environment where life is a complex mix of convenience, modernity, affluence, religion and politics (Gorney, 2016; Al-Rasheed and Azzam, 2012).

While current academic research significantly lacks focus on women and leadership in the KSA, especially in the context of higher education (Abalkhail, 2017), there is consensus among researchers on the very low representation of Saudi women in leadership positions (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Very rare exceptions, such as the female Dean of Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (Almunajjed, 2010), show that technically and legally there are no absolute restrictions on women being leaders; instead, the issue may be institutional or cultural, where men may oppose the idea of women leading men. In this respect, it may be more of a cultural matter than an organisational one. However, in countries like Saudi Arabia, culture has a strong influence on every aspect of organisational affairs.

In terms of human development, one field where Saudi women have made commendable progress is that of higher education. The number of women lecturers increased over four times from 4700 in 2003 to 19,600 in 2008. During the same period, the number of male lecturers rose by only 7200, to 48,800 (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Part of the explanation may be that there had been a shortage of female HEIs, so rising numbers of lecturers could correspond to a rise in demand for female education. Surprisingly, however, whilst the number of female lecturers has increased significantly, the same cannot be said for the number of women leaders (Alomair, 2015; Jamjoom and Kelly, 2013; Al-Ohali and Al-Mehrej, 2012). This is particularly concerning, since despite the increase in qualified women, they have insufficient leadership opportunities, especially in education, which was until recently one of the few sectors of employment open to women in Saudi Arabia. The situation seems not to have changed much since Smith (1987) noted that the Saudi education system itself subjugates women by ensuring that they will always have positions inferior to those of men. The government has tried to alter the status quo by appointing women to some senior decision-making positions, such as deputy Minister of Education, and this has indeed yielded some positive results for women, as has their appointment to the Shura Council, where they can raise issues concerning women. With female representatives attending meetings also attended by King Salman and the Crown Prince, the prohibition on interactions between unrelated men and women seems to have been

removed (Al-Sudairy, 2017). Women fighting and winning municipal elections indicates some confidence in women's leadership, albeit at local levels (Al-Sudairy, 2017).

The situation remains unfavourable for women, however, as their representation in senior leadership positions is only 3.2% in the Middle East and North Africa region (Patel and Buiting, 2013) and less than 1% in Gulf countries (Sperling et al., 2014). Table 3.2 indicates the steeply sloping pyramidal structure of the cohort of female leaders in HE arranged by rank, compared to men, indicating that very few women have managed to rise towards the top and that only one has reached the position of President, at Princess Nourah University.

Table 1: Numbers of Saudi female leaders in higher education

Position	Number of women	Number of men
President of the university	1	33
Vice-president	12	128
Dean	61	330
Deputy dean of faculty	228	542
Total	302	1033

Source: Ministry of Education (2017)

The table indicates that with rising rank, the representation of women decreases, which can be attributed only partly to the smaller number of female universities. It may be argued that women have made significant progress, even if this has not yet resulted them in reaching top positions. The problem, however, is that the overall strategy and policy of the institution is decided at the top and this is precisely why it is essential to have sufficient representation of women in top positions.

2.7.3 Barriers to women attaining leadership in Saudi HEIs

It remains a popular and culturally influenced perception that Saudi women are less capable managers than men, but empirical evidence does not support this perception. Al-Shamrani (2015) even found evidence to the contrary, yet women in Saudi Arabia face a

number of barriers in rising to leadership positions. Hodges (2017) categorises these as social, religious, cultural and organisational.

2.7.3.1 Cultural barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia

Since the founding of Islam, the main source of Islamic instruction has been the Holy Quran, whose text has been interpreted by religious scholars and others in such a manner that the teachings of the Quran are now considered to underpin the culture and way of life of all Muslim societies. However, the scriptural text has been interpreted differently from place to place and from time to time within the Islamic world. Those Muslims who have adopted a changed perspective and now believe in gender equality will interpret the Quran as supporting this belief, whereas more conservative scholars persist in a traditional interpretation of gender roles, "regardless of globalization, the media revolution, the social transformations, the demographic shifts and the economic waves of affluence that the country has passed through over the last few decades" (Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan, 2017, p. 32). There have thus been many conservative religious scholars in Saudi Arabia who have always encouraged women to remain at home and who have cited and interpreted various verses of Quran to support their claims about women's duty to serve their husbands and children (Metcalfe, 2011).

According to the conservative perspective of such religious scholars, women are required to dedicate themselves completely to their husbands and children and must focus on providing a nurturing environment, whereas men are expected to devote their strength and energies to providing materially for their families. This conservative cultural perspective has significantly influenced women's employment and attainment of leadership positions. Muslim scholars in Saudi Arabia have gained the support of those in other Muslim countries to stand against women's education, career development and leadership. Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan (2017) cite Alsheha (2000) as warning that coeducation "drags man and woman into sin and they drift towards moral decay. Such actions will definitely threaten the precious and holy ties between them, and then there will be no room for trust and confidence in one another" (p. 32). Such conservative religious views inevitably affect the thinking of ordinary people, with consequences for women's

rights to education and work, which constitute a significant barrier to their career advancement. This is because Islam plays a significant and pivotal role in delineating the culture of Saudi Arabia and is considered to serve as the cardinal impetus in controlling and regulating social principles, protocols, standards and credos that have been inculcated from birth by relatives and institutions.

Women's rights in Saudi Arabia have been considered to be not only under conventional bondage but also under customary bondage, because Islam has given them many rights and securities; however, the people's own beliefs may also restrict women's progress towards achieving leadership positions (Gazzaz, 2017). The Holy Quran states that men and women are equal, yet Saudi Arabia occupies a very low position in the gender parity index.

Although the female literacy rate in Saudi Arabia has significantly increased in the last four decades, limited cultural change has occurred in the thinking of most people on women being employed, holding leadership positions and taking decisions (Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010). The customs and traditions of society are responsible for developing people's attitudes towards the two genders and the attitude of people at large towards women as managers and decision-makers have not significantly changed. Customs and traditions have tended to exacerbate the problem of gender stereotyping, forming a significant cultural barrier to women's ascent through the hierarchy (Hodges, 2017). The conservative orientation of men towards women poses a barrier to women's progression (Al-Manasra, 2013). Recent studies have nevertheless shown that women in the Arab world have started participating in the workforce and often rise to lower management ranks (Tlaiss, 2014). The freedom given to Saudi women has eliminated the conservative barriers to some extent and is improving their lives. The modernising reforms in Saudi Arabia have increased the participation of women in the workforce and their effective role in leadership.

The Saudi education model initially evolved largely from the *madrassa* system, intended to provide religious education to children and specifically to teach Wahhabism (Husain, 2018). Although a more Westernised education model was later adopted, Saudi education has remained strongly influenced by the Islamic traditions whereby male domination was systematically enforced through religious teaching. Men are considered to be the guardians of Islamic principles and have always been granted supreme authority in the Islamic system, which retains a significant influence of Shariah principles. For a long time,

the religious councils were exclusively male, leading to the development of a male-dominated society. In the last two decades, there has been some involvement of women in religious bodies. Nevertheless, men have retained overall control of them and this has allowed the development of principles that allow males to maintain control over the female population (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). In the past, the Westernisation of women's education met strong opposition from religious clerics. The key arguments against King Faisal's plan to Westernise education for women were presented by the male Islamic scholars of the *ulama*. For example, changes to the subjects being taught in female universities are decided by senior leaders, albeit with the recommendations of teachers and other relevant authorities within the universities. This may be the reason why, despite the very high literacy rate among Saudi females, their participation in the workforce remains low.

A major element of this problem is that people are restricted from changing themselves and their cultural perspective by their own lack of awareness that the problem exists (Bombuwela and Alwis, 2013).

2.7.3.2 Organisational barriers

Saudi Arabia has 24 public and 13 private universities, all of which are governed by the Ministry of Education. Each has a board of management which is required to meet at least twice a month to discuss matters related to the university. One of the factors which has hindered the progression of women to board positions is the reluctance of male members to sit and discuss matters with women (Hodges, 2017). Saudi Arabian culture excludes women from high-level decision making and this is evident in organisational culture as well. The high power distance characteristic of Saudi Arabian culture is based on power allocation attributed to the position of the person (Syed et al., 2018). In Saudi culture, people in lower positions have to follow the instructions of their superiors. In such an environment, owing to cultural beliefs, male members are also reluctant to be guided by female leaders (Hodges, 2017).

Abalkhail (2017) explored the challenges and opportunities for Saudi women and leadership in interviews with 22 women in two Saudi HEIs and found that male members were likely to be given precedence over women, despite the latter holding better credentials in terms of both qualifications and experience. According to her study's participants, this discrimination can be attributed to religious and cultural factors that have a significant bearing on organisational culture in Saudi Arabia. Women's ability to lead is also hampered by being barred from important board meetings, which impedes information flow to women and restricts them from raising issues that matter to female staff.

Some authors have also reported on discrimination in promotion, with men being promoted far sooner than women. As a result, women rise to much lower positions than men with same qualifications and experience (AlDoubi, 2014). Abalkhail (2017) also found that women receive far fewer training opportunities to improve their leadership skills.

Almansour and Kempner (2016) comment that family obligations and other cultural forces often pose a barrier to women's participation in conferences and other events which are essential for their professional development. For example, until recently, male guardianship laws restricted Saudi women from travelling abroad to attend conferences. Women also struggle to get permission from university management to attend such events and conferences. Almansour and Kempner (2016) therefore suggest that female leaders who have reached relatively high positions must have shown exemplary will and motivation.

Alsubaihi (2016) conducted a quantitative study of 78 faculty members in three universities in the Riyadh region and found that centralised power structures and limited authority led to a deliberate exclusion of women from strategic decision making. Almansour and Kempner (2016) echoed these findings, based on several papers (Almobaireek, 2006; Alsayeg, 2006; Bobshait, 2006).

Almengash (2009) highlights poor standards of leadership, such as inadequate guidelines and poor job descriptions, as well as multiple male and female departmental directors, resulting in communication problems, poor coordination and conflict. One of the key issues is gender segregation in society, which makes it difficult for male and female workers to work together. Since men are generally given higher social positions in Saudi society,

women are forced to work in subordinate positions in most organisations, not because they lack the skills, but because gender issues may make it difficult to coordinate functions at the top.

2.7.3.3 Personal barriers

Biases, prejudices and social issues are significant factors that hamper the progress of women in society and in their careers (Hodges, 2017). All of the past evidence and theories have associated the model of successful leadership with masculinity and the male managerial perspective is more operative than the female one. As a result, the female perspective on leadership is resisted by most people and not significantly used in operations in Saudi Arabia (Ghorbani and Tung, 2007; Jain and Mukherji, 2010). This reveals the gender differences and stereotypes responsible for the glass ceiling effect, which is invisible yet affects the career growth of women. Customs and traditions thus influence not only the social but also the organisational perspective on the capabilities of women.

Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair (2017) found that the Saudi Arabian community takes a modern approach to many aspects of life. According to this historical perspective, the culture of the country has assumed that only males have leadership qualities, and this gender stereotyping has created a glass ceiling effect. The male culture in the country has influenced everyone to believe that men are able to perform better than women, a perception which hinders women's entry to higher-level positions (Al-Manasra, 2013).

Organisational and societal factors have been significantly associated with women's development, career advancement and achievement of leadership positions, while it has also been found that some behavioural traits of women affect their empowerment and growth. For instance, women are subject to greater pressure in career advancement and development because they are also required to prove themselves (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The burden of career development is solely on women and "women that have achieved positions of responsibility will have certain behavioural traits and an internal level of ambition in which they internalize their own career objectives, and through hard work and dedication these objectives are manifested" (Albakry, 2016, p. 10).

A study by Al-Suwaihel (2009) found that female leaders in Kuwait explained their cultural experience and asserted that the environment in which women grow up is required to be very healthy, as it forms the solid foundation for the growth of their leadership skills and personality. The study also found that women were required to be more aware of their personal rights and freedoms, and that they must be empowered to assume their social and professional responsibilities. Abu-Khader (2012) found that Saudi Arabian women faced various challenges in following their careers and assuming leadership positions because of many cultural, organisational and technical restrictions, as well as a lack of empowerment and self-image. This finding is consistent with the conclusion of Al-Ahmadi (2011) that cultural restrictions impede the ability of women and their effectiveness as leaders. This is therefore a significant factor explaining the challenges to career advancement faced by women in the Gulf countries.

Women are less empowered in Saudi Arabia, in spite of significant achievements in higher education, because of the traditions, culture and gender segregation in Saudi society (Hodges, 2017; Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Women are not given the independence due to them, or trusted to exercise responsibilities on their own (Almunajjed, 2010). They often have to work under the supervision or instructions of males, which restricts their empowerment and their growth as leaders. One particular problem is that with very few exceptions, no women are given the opportunity to hold leadership positions in any Saudi Arabian university. Women are routinely denied not only senior leadership positions in HEIs, such as that of president, but also those of dean or departmental chair (AlRuwais, 2014). Women leaders are slowly becoming more evident in higher education, but their participation in decision making is still affected by institutional structures, social norms and traditional beliefs (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). However, having women on the boards of businesses is likely to have benefits for the community and organisations, as they perform effectively. Hodges (2017) conducted qualitative research into the obstacles to women's advancement in Saudi Arabia. She collected data using semi-structured interviews with 25 Saudi female professionals and found that in many public and private sector organisations, women are answerable to men, which significantly reduces or affects their sense of accountability and responsibility. This may lead to a systematic undermining of leadership capabilities, for others as well as for the females themselves. It has also been found that

inadequate leadership training offered to women in Saudi Arabia restricts their attainment of leadership positions in the education sector. Adequate training is extremely important for the empowerment of women, so that they can meet the demands of their roles as leaders (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Various studies have found that women in the Arabian Gulf region remain restricted to traditional family roles and to expectations of financial dependence, whereas men are expected to hold senior positions and to be financially independent (Al Alhareth et al., 2015; Alexander, 2013). According to World Economic Forum statistics for 2016, Saudi Arabia was in 141st position among 144 countries for parity in gender, down from 134th of 145 in 2015, clearly demonstrating the existence of a very wide gender gap in the Kingdom (Syed et al., 2018). This gender gap is consistent with a situation whereby women's favourable attitudes towards female participation in work and in higher education contrast with the unwillingness of men in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Arab world to share their authority and responsibilities with women.

Alomair (2015) found a significant contradiction in the Arab world regarding the status, responsibility and social position of women, reflecting a significant gender gap in the fabric of Arab culture. The contradiction was mainly related to men's and women's status, responsibility and position in society.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Issues of gender and leadership arise not only in the field of education but across other occupations as well (Aldoubi, 2014; AlMunajjed, 2010; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Ryan and Haslam, 2007). It is clear from the literature on cultures and organisations that perceptions of leadership marginalise women directly or indirectly (Blackmore, 2010), with education being no exception (Aldoubi, 2014; Blandford et al., 2011; Singh, 2008; 2002). Higher education has seen a six-fold increase in the enrolment and participation levels of women across the globe in the last 40 years (Morley, 2013; UNESCO, 2010; Leathwood and Read, 2009). However, these numbers may not translate into effective representation in leadership roles in HE establishments, with Morley (2013) and Aldoubi (2014) observing that males significantly outnumber females in academic leadership.

This chapter will discuss the evidence gathered by an extensive body of research into the barriers identified as hindering women's career advancement, both in education and in other fields. The literature review will focus on the aims and objectives of the present research in an attempt to identify the research gaps. The chapter will thus serve as the foundation of the study and will also help in developing its theoretical framework. It is organised into sections focusing on leadership in the education sector, as well as covering women's employment and leadership in Saudi Arabia and the organisational and personal barriers that Saudi women face in achieving leadership positions in higher education.

The previous chapter examined the status and social position of women in Saudi Arabia and the barriers they face in achieving higher education as well as cultural and religious obstacles to their attaining senior management positions. Women's participation in leadership in higher education may be seen as useful in ensuring that policies on female education are decided by individuals who are aware of the issues that women face (AlDoubi, 2014). Section 3.5 will discuss organisational and personal barriers in detail, examining extensive evidence from the literature and analysing each type of barrier. The

last section will discuss the evidence for ways in which women in Saudi Arabia can enact their roles as leaders in spite of the various barriers they face.

3.2 Leadership

Northouse (2010) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.3), while for Kelloway and Barling (2010) it is a process in which individuals with higher formal positions in organisations exert social and political influence to achieve the desired behaviour among individuals lower in the formal power hierarchy.

In this thesis, 'leadership' refers to individuals in senior managerial positions, where they directly participate in decision making at organisational levels. It is mainly attributed not to the implicit power that these individuals may hold but instead to the explicit organisational position linked with the responsibility of higher-level strategic decision making (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). For example, in the context of educational leadership, this could mean the ability to make decisions regarding courses taught, financial decisions of the university/ college, recruitment and admission policies etc. (Alwedinani, 2016). Hence, for this thesis, a leader is understood to be an individual who is responsible for higher (or the highest) level decision making within their domain in any organisation. This means that leadership refers not only to top managers but also to divisional managers who are responsible for making critical decisions for their departments.

Decisions within an organisation are often made not by an individual but by committees of individuals; hence, there is not only one leader but several leaders in their respective departments (Alwedinani, 2016). One issue that has proved to be a barrier to lifting women to leadership positions in Saudi Arabia is the cultural restriction of their freedom of action, such the prohibition of meeting unrelated men (AlDoubi, 2014). In organisational settings, leaders have to meet for discussions quite often, so restrictions on meeting unrelated men curtails women's opportunities to seek leadership positions, as this would require them to interacting with such men (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

3.3 Women and leadership

3.3.1 Feminine leadership style

Many advocates of diversity in the boardroom have suggested that adequate gender representation in decision-making bodies is likely to improve the quality of decisions made. In other words, they suggest that women have different leadership styles compared to men and that their inclusion in decision making is consequently likely to improve its quality (Eagly, 2007).

Leadership styles can be associated with the notion that gender may affect leadership style (Pounder and Coleman, 2002). Eagly (2007) carried out various meta-analyses of previous studies concerning the leadership style of the two genders. According to Eagly and Johnson (1990), the results of the meta-analysis of studies between 1961 and 1987, using student participants, suggest that leadership styles were influenced by gender stereotypes. The researchers found that women's leadership styles were democratic and interpersonally oriented, while men's styles were autocratic and task-oriented (Eagly and Johnson, 1990).

A meta-analysis of studies concerned with managers' motivation to manage in a traditional hierarchical style found that men were more competitive, assertive, aggressive and authoritative than women and that women showed less motivation to impose authority in decision-making scenarios through a command-control style (Eagly, Karau, Miner and Johnson, 1994). According to Merchant (2012), women may have more of a participative management style, as opposed to men's more authoritative leadership approaches. The former is an inclusive style of leadership characterised by shared and decentralised decision making. In countries like Saudi Arabia with a high-power distance culture, managers may prefer an authoritative leadership style over a participative one (Mellahi, 2006).

Another meta-analysis, by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen (2003), examined 45 studies to compare the leadership styles of men and women leaders and managers, mainly in education and business. These studies used the scale of transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership styles. The comparisons revealed that male leaders were more transactional than women leaders, where males implemented agentic styles. In contrast,

women leaders were more transformational in the sense that they adopted a more communal, supportive style than men (Eagly et al., 2003).

Additionally, Eagly (2007) discussed a double bind that female leaders encountered. On one hand, they were expected to have a communal style of leadership based on their gender stereotypes and social roles, while on the other, they were expected to behave in an agentic leadership style to fulfil their leadership role and be effective leaders. As a result, negative attitudes can limit female access to leadership positions, promote the preservation of the status quo and increase evaluation biases against women when they gain access to leadership positions (Eagly, 2007).

3.3.2 Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is usually associated with formal organisational positions in educational institutions (Aldoubi, 2014). However, there are also informal leaders such as subject specialists whose influence stems from their subject knowledge or skills with groups of learners, or individuals who have social influence over the views and attitudes of their peers (Alwedinani, 2016). This thesis uses the word 'leadership' to refer to the individuals in senior managerial positions who participate in organisational decision making.

A key aspect of educational leadership is an understanding of the organisational context (Robinson, 2007). Individuals who have long service in an organisation will understand its core issues and culture, which makes them effective as leaders in that organisation. This contextualised leadership role is more effective than bringing in an outsider who may enact policies and strategies which do not work in the specific organisational context (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Furthermore, using such contextualised knowledge to fulfil the current objectives of the workplace is likely to minimise wastage of time, effort and resources (Peleg, 2012). Institutional leaders try to understand how business is conducted in their organisations; they analyse cultural and social alienation, the procedures and the running of those institutions (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Effective leaders have "contextual literacy" (Calo et al., 2015, p.31), which includes understanding the type of institutional behaviour, the

reasons for it and the learning values on which it is based. Effective leadership requires leaders to delve into the social and interpersonal dynamics of the institution: its organisational structure, history and politics (Peleg, 2012). They have to get to know the role-holders and to understand the micro-politics inside and outside the institution. They also face issues related to the level of institutional performance, strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities to develop and learn that exist there. They must take into account economic factors and the character of the community that the institution serves (Peleg, 2012).

On the basis of these considerations, it can be argued that it may be useful if leaders in universities and colleges are selected from among the workforce rather than from outside (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Following the same line of argument, it can be suggested that the most effective leaders of female universities will be among the female employees who have worked there for some time and so will deeply understand the context of the university (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Conversely, appointing as head of a university an individual from outside who has never worked there may lead to dysfunctional strategy and policy, established without adequate knowledge of the context (Karaevli and Zajac 2013).

Teaching and learning are the main objectives in schools and leaders must be accustomed to teaching in order to be able to create a suitable environment for effective teaching and learning. The level of performance of any education system depends on the quality of the teachers (Whelan, 2009). In other words, the "quality of the education system cannot raise the level of the teachers but rather the other way around" (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p.16). If this argument is accepted, then it can be inferred that the leader must be interested in, and be capable of improving, the performance of the teachers. Arguably, it can be said that only leaders who are aware of the context of the institution and how and what will improve the performance of the teachers can be truly effective (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). In the case of Saudi all-female universities, these characteristics are most likely to apply to Saudi female teachers who have worked in a particular university for a sufficiently long time, because they are likely to be aware of its culture and of the issues affecting it. Since gender segregation means that males are not involved in the day-to-day management of female institutions, male leaders may not be aware of these things in the context of female institutions (Gazzaz, 2017). Therefore, promoting women within such

institutions is likely to lead to the appointment of more effective leaders as compared to recruiting men from outside. However, this practice is not common, especially in Saudi universities, as shown by the great disparity in the representation of females in senior management positions (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013).

3.3.3 Women and leadership in higher education

The difficulties that women face in attaining and exercising leadership within HE is a global phenomenon, the cause of which is rooted in a variety of factors. Tomas et al. (2010) present evidence that the root causes lie in gender stereotypes, discrimination, bias and social perceptions of women as being somehow inferior and/or less adept than their male counterparts. Women can be overlooked for higher-level positions in workplaces as a result of their involvement and personal commitments towards their families (Tomas et al., 2010). Bornstein (2007) places particular emphasis upon childcare, inflexible hours and work schedules, noting that there are very few women in senior management positions which can lead to leadership roles. Bower (1993) states that as a result of there being a scarcity of women in high-level positions, there is a lack of role models and mentors available to nurture any potential female leaders. It is also relevant that a number of women consciously decide not to apply for leadership positions or else make career decisions which indirectly exclude the possibility of a leadership role in the future (Kellerman and Rhode, 2007). The main reason for this is that women are either affected by the norms of a male-dominated society or are excluded by gender segregation from senior management decision making (Aldoubi, 2014). In support of Aldoubi, females also have limited opportunities to participate in workplace activities such as curriculum planning that could lead them to senior leadership positions and often suffer from lack of self-confidence (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015).

Women in the West also have issues with regard to discrimination and bias in the workplace. For example, in spite of legislation such as the Equal Pay Act (1963) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), women in the United States were still paid less than men across the board in 2005 (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Data obtained in 2017-18 reveal the existence of a gender wage gap in most countries and most organisations, private and public alike (World

Economic Forum, 2017). Interestingly, no such gender pay gap exists in the Saudi Arabian public sector, as men and women working in the same roles are paid the same salary. The main issue is the comparatively slower progression of women and lack of opportunities to rise to leadership positions (Aldoubi, 2014).

Overt sexism in the workplace is also an issue, with Touchton et al. (1993) reporting that 80% of female college CEOs felt that they were treated differently with regard to access to leadership positions, whilst Mullen (2009) reports female department heads as recording sexist behaviour within their departments. Sexist behaviour took the form of females being required to fulfil additional responsibilities and obligations with regard to the delivery of courses and to serve on committees, leaving male colleagues free to conduct research and/ or assess the credentials of potential students. Mullen (2009) states that there is a lack of opportunities within departments and faculty that would affect females' promotion. Furthermore, Schmitt et al. (2009) state that it was often the case that women were selected to serve on committees simply in order to provide a token female presence.

In addition, Sandler (1993) points out that women are often discounted as potential leaders due to their gender, which Drago et al. (2005) suggest, contributes towards women's tendency to structure their personal and family commitments to avoid extended working hours. This has the risk of weakening their professional standing and potential for promotion. Another contributory factor to the lack of women in leadership roles may be the influence of men who wish to maintain the status quo and who consciously and/or unconsciously exclude women when leadership roles become available (Smith, 2002; Aldoubi, 2014).

The perceived importance of the status quo and women's traditional roles is highlighted by Wolfinger et al. (2009), who state that in the academic world, single and childless women are far more successful in their careers. A number of studies, including those by Eckel et al. (2009) and Touchton (2008), make similar assertions that women in leadership positions are likely to be either unmarried or divorced, leading to the conclusion that it is extremely difficult for women in academia to have both a stable family life and a career. Following the social norms that have existed for many decades, women generally choose to stay at home rather than relying on male family members to take care of their children (Drago et al. 2005). Those who are married find it difficult to accommodate the demands

of childcare while fulfilling a leadership role in higher education, with Touchton (2008) finding that in 2006, only 68% of female college presidents had children, compared to 91% of their male colleagues.

Despite the challenges identified above, there are women who take initiatives regarding working and not staying at home. Saudi Arabia has started offering opportunities to females in higher education, along with improving the overall proportion of female employment (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013). However, the societal traditions which see women as caregivers and nurturers of children clearly hamper their ability be appointed and/or successful in leadership roles in higher education (Drago et al., 2006; Williams, 2000). Those who attempt to have both find it necessary to plan their bearing of children carefully in order that it does not interfere with their academic careers, which in some cases leads to women choosing not to have children at all (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2006; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

The maintenance of traditional values is identified by White (2003) as being an issue for women aspiring to and/or having leadership roles in higher education in Australia. White focuses on the claim that organisational policies which sought to redress the balance and bring more equal opportunities for women were not effective, as a result of the fact that "equity discourses are not theoretically framed by feminism and are not sufficiently operating as resistance to dominant epistemologies and ideologies" (Morley, 1999, p. 72). The dominant discourses and the socialisation processes serve to subjugate women to the extent that they are able to rise only to a level which men can "tolerate" (Bagilhole, 2000, p. 140).

In addition, the competitive nature of acquiring leadership roles and of the subsequent conduct of those roles is at variance with the characteristics of a majority of females, by which they look to ensure that everyone within the community is cared for and valued (Merchant, 2012). Most women rely upon the notion that their hard work and commitment, as well as the quality of their work, will be recognised and rewarded for their fundamental value, therefore failing to promote themselves (Merchant, 2012), which is a necessity in a competitive climate. O'Connor (2000) suggests that the only way to combat this is to engage in the collective resistance strategies that challenge long-held positions such as the role of women and the tension between work and family. This exposes facets

of organisational culture that are not woman-friendly and highlights instances of career structures which favour men. For example, women are less likely to lead in organisations with extremely hierarchical structures and exclusively top-down communication, because women's leadership is considered more inclusive and participative, an approach more commonly seen in organisations with a flatter structure (Longman et al., 2018).

Academic circles have been and continue to be dominated by men (Al-Asfour et al., 2017) and this situation can be perpetuated as a result of managers, who are usually men, looking favourably upon those who are most like them: other middle-class men (Thornton, 2000). Those women who are appointed are often considered to be ineffectual and seen as a token female presence (Bagilhole and White, 2008; Bagilhole, 2000), which White (2003) argues does nothing to further the position of women in the highest circles of academia.

Diel and Dzubinski (2016) state that women face several social and personal barriers against their advancement to executive leadership. While legislation designed to combat gender discrimination has done a good deal to raise awareness with regard to equality of opportunity for leadership positions, it has arguably merely driven such discrimination underground (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2003). Diel and Dzubinski (2016) cite evidence that top-down, highly hierarchical organisational structures promote patriarchal values, leaving women subservient to men and following stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity. Gender issues are often hidden as a result of male domination being the norm (Sheppard, 1992), with barriers being constructed unintentionally as a result of a lack of awareness and entrenched practices within specific establishments and society in general (Bird, 2011). Ely et al. (2011) argue that the steady accumulation of such barriers prevents women from visualising themselves as leaders, as well as having a similar impact on those around them.

Diel and Dzubinski (2016) recognise the work that has been conducted with regard to the problems of being a working parent and caregiver (Perrakis and Martinez, 2012; Hoobler et al., 2009; Poduval and Poduval, 2009), the impact of gender stereotypes on women's leadership (Carli and Eagly, 2011; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell and Risikari, 2011; Eagly and Chin, 2010), the lack of role models, mentors and sponsorship (Tolar, 2012; Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin and Sumberg, 2010) and the consequences of women's lack of self-confidence for their careers (Devillard, Sancier, Werner, Maller and Kossoff, 2013; Bowles and Flynn, 2010). Against this background, Diel and Dzubinski (2016) performed a cross-sector

analysis of barriers to executive leadership positions in religious organisations. The results indicate that both groups of women faced similar leadership barriers and that these were "deeply embedded in organisational structures and functions, rendering them at times virtually invisible" (Diel and Dzubinski, 2016, p. 203), necessitating a broader focus of strategies to address them.

The absence of women leaders not only severely limits the availability of role models but also creates an environment which is not seen as female-friendly (Grogan and Shakeshift, 2011). For example, organisational policies are set by male leaders who are not aware of the various issues and challenges that female workers face. This means that a barrier-ridden environment is likely to continue to hamper the progress of female workers aspiring to leadership positions.

Cheaupalakit (2014) cites cultural barriers as one of the root causes of the glass ceiling effect that prevents women from taking leadership positions in education. Specific cultures, particularly in patriarchal societies, imply particular stereotypical views of women which regard them as being indecisive, weak, emotionally dependent and less productive in comparison to men. Furthermore, in many societies, poor career planning for women, a legacy of male domination and a lack of access to mentoring are barriers that reinforce the glass ceiling effect for women (Cheaupalakit, 2014). Alternatively, Katuna (2014) examines institutional factors which militate against women acquiring leadership positions, finding that effective leadership was determined by individuals' prestige and their ability to engage actively with stakeholders and to lead strategic initiatives. Oakley (2000) argues that opportunities are not provided for women because of their lack of experience, gender differences in socialisation and linguistic styles, and limited career opportunities as a result of gender-based stereotypes. Of interest in this context is the contention of Eagly (2007) that women can maintain effective leadership styles and that the barriers which they experience are determined by cultural and institutional factors, as opposed to personal characteristics.

3.3.4 Women and leadership in Islamic countries

As the previous sections have shown, females are underrepresented in leadership in the Middle East. The traditional gender hierarchies and patriarchal organisational systems restrict them from reaching leadership positions as patriarchal structures and masculine leadership benefit men by facilitating their access to good positions. The roles occupied by women in the Middle East have nonetheless changed significantly over the past few years. The proportion of females attending colleges and matriculation or graduate schools and taking doctorate degrees has increased significantly (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2014). No longer are women subject to low expectations in terms of the workforce and education. They are treated equally in the field of banking and in other sectors such as marketing and information technology. However, they continue to face a number of obstacles at the leadership level (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2014).

According to Marinakou (2014), women very rarely if ever occupied the highest managerial positions in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. However, there was then an increase in the numbers with leadership roles, so that among the top 500 companies in the Middle East in 2005, women accounted for 46.5% of management posts, but still occupied only 8% of the top positions, statistics which provide continued evidence of the glass ceiling effect (Alshammari, 2018). This informal process continues to account for major inequalities within organisations, particularly through gender inequality and by reducing women's chances of promotion. Some argue that the root cause is the poor education patterns followed by women, while others blame the glass ceiling effect (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Selection processes and workplace relationships also represent significant challenges for women, obliging them to stay in one position for a longer time, regardless of their academic qualifications and knowledge.

Globalisation is another barrier that has begun to pose certain challenges for women throughout the world (Kauser and Tlaiss, 2011), as women may struggle to adjust to the diverse culture in organisations. Globalisation has also increased the need for knowledge and behaviours that are in line with the globalised environment in which organisations operate. Perhaps the major factor has been the adoption of new cultural and social norms (Kemp, Madsen and Davis, 2015). A large number of women are failing to accept sudden

changes, which affects their career and leadership qualities (Strout, 2001). People in most countries have not dealt adequately with this issue because of their persistent perception of women as incapable of doing business as well as men (Strout, 2001).

Contrary to these reactionary views, the empirical evidence gathered in workplace settings has shown that women leaders and managers in higher positions are at least as effective as their male counterparts (Dimovski, Skerlavaj and Man, 2010). Despite this evidence, preference in recruitment is given to males over females who hold higher qualifications and are more experienced (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015). This can be largely explained in Islamic countries by cultural inertia and the authority associated with religious views. According to Alshammari (2018), women in Saudi Arabia are denied their basic rights in areas such as higher education (in terms of the subjects they can study) and employment. This major concern is linked with the existence of the glass ceiling effect, which is taken as the crucial factor in the country. The glass ceiling affects the progression of women in the workplace, with potential consequences for both the demand and supply of growth and development opportunities for women. This may partly explain why women have been somewhat deprived of the opportunity to study certain subjects.

Research by Albakry (2016) concludes that the glass ceiling effect has a threefold operation in Saudi Arabia. These are the main factors behind the various obstacles that women in Saudi Arabia face throughout their lives and careers. Women are always underrepresented in senior managerial positions, not only in the KSA but also in other countries. Research shows that in certain countries, women's right to accession to leadership is diminished in the name of culture (Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Al-Bakr et al., 2017). This is quite common in countries with a masculine culture, where gender segregation is common and where males are reluctant to be supervised by females. Furthermore, in masculine societies the focus is on competitiveness, which renders the situation of women even more vulnerable, as Saudi culture sees women as playing a fundamentally supportive role rather than a competitive one (AlDoubi, 2014). However, while the situation of women is difficult throughout the world, Marinakou (2014) believes that they can easily reach and perform at the top positions. Addressing the inequalities of opportunity in management can be argued to be the best way to resolve these issues and to change the perceptions of society at large, so that women and men are treated equally in the fields of education and employment,

overcoming the restrictions on mobility and career enhancement typified by the glass ceiling effect (Al-Asfour et al., 2017).

The patriarchal culture predominant in Muslim countries has been identified as a significant factor behind the misrecognition of women's leadership capabilities and the privileging of masculine leadership traits. Over the past few decades, however, women in the Islamic world have participated increasingly in higher education and progress here has been dramatic, according to Hilal (2015), who found that just over half of Saudi Arabian universities accept females and that there are 151,000 women studying for bachelor's degrees, in comparison with 513,000 men.

The situation of women in leadership in Indonesia has also changed over the years. Nevertheless, Airin (2010) found that while 40% of teachers in Indonesia were male and 60% female, the proportions were more than reversed in terms of senior positions such as that of principal, so that only 35% of higher-level positions in the education sector were occupied by women in 2010. This finding shows Indonesian women to be underrepresented in educational leadership positions (Airin, 2010).

Similarly, in Malaysia, while many women work as teachers, support staff or faculty members in various educational institutions, there are reports showing a disproportionately high number of men in the top administrative positions. In the last few years, however, the number of women in top managerial positions has increased to the point where women in Malaysia are not treated differently from men to a greater extent than across the membership of the United Nations as a whole (Morley, Berma and Hamid, 2017). Females now account for a large proportion of the academic labour market in Malaysia and occupy approximately 30% of the senior decision-making positions.

Previously, women in Malaysia were considered ineffective at making decisions in specialised industries and agencies, but the situation has changed to the point where they are given equal opportunities to put forward their views while participating in the top positions in companies (Unin, 2014). In some parts of the world, including Malaysia, however, women are still excluded from making crucial decisions (Morley, Berma and Hamid, 2017). Regardless of changes in attitude among the public at large, there are some parts of the country where people still hold the misconception that women are incapable of taking major decisions, leading to a lack of moral support and a denial of the chance to

occupy top managerial positions (Mehran, 2003). Mehran goes on to say that the higher education system has undergone significant change over the last two decades, but recent statistics indicate that Malaysia still faces certain difficulties in educating women due to the prevailing sociocultural norms.

Iran is an Islamic state where there are also a number of issues regarding gender inequality and its effects on educational levels (Mehran, 2003). All but a very small part of Iran's population of 80 million is Muslim and this society has enjoyed strong human development along with increasingly high rates of literacy. Muslim women are becoming literate and participating in human development, increasingly gaining the skills needed to take up employment and develop their careers. At each stage, however, the question of women's responsibilities and values has been addressed and challenged. Women in Iran are not allowed to pursue their careers as they would wish, but there have been recent changes in their participation in the higher education system and in the labour market more generally (Hilal, 2015).

In another Muslim country, Pakistan, academic disciplines such as science, mathematics and technology are considered largely the domain of men. A study by Edushine (2016) reports that women represent less than 40% participation in entry-level jobs in higher education and that only a quarter of positions at professor level are occupied by females. It is worth considering some comparative data on countries which do not have a Muslim majority, beginning with Pakistan's neighbour, India. The data regarding Indian women's participation in an academic leadership position are striking, as only 7% of senior-level and leadership positions in higher education in India are occupied by women (Edushine, 2016). Furthermore, only 6.67% of Indian HEIs are specifically headed by women, showing that the country also lags behind developed nations like the United States (18%), the United Kingdom (17%) and Australia (21%) (Morley and Crossouard, 2015).

The literature shows that females' access to leadership roles in education in individual countries is affected by factors including cultural elements, economic conditions and social issues, all of which constrain the effectiveness of education systems for females. Levels of competency are increasing as globalisation demands more employees with ever higher skills and qualifications. Research has demonstrated that women are equally capable of competing in this process and of doing their best to improve the economic performance of

companies, public bodies and whole nations. However, the literature suggests that systems must be improved to grant women the same access to opportunities as men, so that they can enhance their leadership talents and play a full part in decision making. This will be possible only if countries implement changes to human resource management and other effective structures to appreciate the values and perspectives of women in every sector.

3.4 Women's leadership and the glass ceiling effect

3.4.1 The concept of the glass ceiling

The metaphor of the glass ceiling was coined in the 1980s to refer to the artificial or invisible barriers that block the paths of women or other minorities from advancing in their careers and reaching executive or leadership positions (Dimovski et al., 2010a, b; Johns, 2013; Jain and Mukherji, 2010).

AlDoubi (2014) defines the glass ceiling effect as comprising those "artificial barriers in the workplace which have served to block the advancement of qualified women" (p. 28). Studies have shown that sex and gender discrimination and stereotypes against women persist in contemporary workplaces, despite a body of regulation and legislation intended to prohibit such practices (Glass and Cook, 2016).

Coleman (2011, p. 1) cites Burke (2005) as stating that the term 'glass ceiling effect' is a metaphor referring to "… a subtle and almost invisible but strong barrier that prevents a person from moving up to senior management". Tran (2015, p. 26) modifies this definition by describing the glass ceiling as: "… an invisible, yet quite impenetrable, barrier that serves to prevent all but a disproportionately few women from reaching the highest ranks of the corporate hierarchy, regardless of their achievement and merits." Furthermore, Tran (2015) observes that these barriers are created as a result of organisational, societal and/or individual prejudices. Although this concept can be applied to any underrepresented group, it was initially applied to women (Van Horne and Schaffner, 2003). Jolls (2002) describes the existence of sex and gender discrimination against women in the modern workplace despite affirmative laws that prohibit such actions as a form of the glass ceiling

effect (Goodman, Fields and Blum, 2003; Jolls, 2002; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Ryan and Haslam, 2007).

Pai and Vaidya (2009) examined the existence of the glass ceiling effect in 257 corporations in Texas and found that among the whole sample, only two (0.78%) had women as chief executive officers. They conclude that the glass ceiling effect still exists for women seeking leadership positions, a conclusion consistent with a literature review conducted by Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson (2012), who reviewed 27 manuscripts related to leadership, gender and nationality, 46% of which were from the USA and the remainder from Austria, Brazil, China, Egypt, Georgia, India, Italy, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Nigeria, Sweden, Slovenia, Turkey and the UK. The review focused on five themes: (a) leadership characteristics, behaviour and style, (b) perception regarding leaders, their traits and leadership styles, (c) barriers to women attaining leadership positions, (d) leadership outcomes/results and (e) the effect of research methods on leader evaluation. For the first theme, Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson found that women were less likely to move to leadership positions and that country of origin had little effect on this. Secondly, they found that nationality played a role in the perception of a successful leader and that gender stereotypes affected this perception; successful leadership style was identified as masculine. Furthermore, they found evidence that women seeking leadership positions, regardless of their nationality, face various barriers such as the glass ceiling effect, gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. The results showed no difference between men and women on their managerial efficiency and the authors concluded that evaluation measurements affected the perception of gender and leadership (Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson, 2012).

3.4.2 Glass ceiling effect in higher education

A significant problem associated with the glass ceiling effect is that it exists as the result of multiple organisational, societal and governmental barriers. Although these are by nature invisible, they significantly affect women's career growth (Gregory-Mina, 2012). One sector in which such a strong glass ceiling effect is evident is that of higher education. Although the glass ceiling effect is considered a barrier in the corporate world (Kantek and Gezer, 2010), the strength and invisibility of this barrier is evident for women around the globe in

various fields, including higher education (Eagly and Karau, 2002; French and Raven, 1959; Gregory-Mina, 2012). Many professional women believe that the root cause of the phenomenon is that most institutions and organisations were created by and for men and are based on males' experiences (Growe and Montgomery, 2000; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Munoz, 2010; Pompper, 2011).

Within the field of education, women are able to provide leadership in the classroom, where they undertake the role of guiding the social and academic development of young people (Sirvis, 2005). However, management positions in education are still dominated by men, so that progress into senior leadership roles is much slower for females than for males, while there is evidence that the characteristics which women bring to their leadership are undervalued by many in the field (Reed, 2014). The consequence of this is such that the glass ceiling effect acts to prevent women from rising to the top despite their institutional experience.

3.4.3 Factors contributing to the glass ceiling effect

In many countries around the world, the glass ceiling effect is attributed to organisational, cultural and social barriers that are exercised against women who attempt to access leadership and decision-making positions (Growe and Montgomery, 2000; Schipani, Dworkin, Kwolek-Folland and Maurer, 2008). According to Schmitt, Spoor, Danaher and Branscombe (2009), the glass ceiling effect is a result of the barriers that females face to their advancement to leadership positions. Additionally, they suggest that it occurs because these barriers are so invisible that people cannot acknowledge their presence in today's world. Schmitt et al. (2009) suggest a new form of the glass ceiling effect, noting that in many organisations and even entire countries, a false perception of gender egalitarianism is created by two factors. The first is female tokenism, whereby nations and organisations use the few women who do manage to advance to leadership as a symbol of equal access to leadership, even though there is not equal access. The second factor is that people compare the number of female leaders in the present with some period in the past, presenting this as evidence of women's growing opportunity to lead. Schmitt et al. (2009) suggest that these factors play a very significant role, not only in the perceptions of people

in organisations and societies, but also in discouraging women from supporting one another and from seeking equal access. They conclude that female tokenism and comparisons with the past might maintain the glass ceiling effect as women's advancement to leadership positions is interpreted as gender-egalitarianism or equality (Barreto et al., 2009).

Isacc, Kaatz and Canes (2012) review some empirical studies in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) through the critical lens of social role theory and propose a model of six levels of the glass ceiling effect that women face in seeking or occupying leadership positions. The first is society's preference for stereotypical male traits over female traits and the second is the stereotypical notion that men are more competent than women due to their gender. Third, although women who displayed agentic male traits were viewed as competent in leadership positions, they were also viewed as less likeable and hostile than men. The fourth factor is parenthood and self-selection, demonstrated by women opting out of mobility to leadership. Fifth, women faced constant underestimation of their performance and aspiration; the researchers suggest that professional women are seen as a threat due to the stereotype of incompetence and emotionality. Finally, men evaluate their own abilities and performance more highly than women do. Isaac et al. (2012) conclude that women leaders face many challenges. Stereotypical male characteristics are more valued in society and organisations, forcing women to either adopt such male characteristics to fit in and have their abilities appreciated, or to opt out by not seeking leadership positions.

Insch, McIntyre and Napier (2008) argue that many organisations have created a second-layer glass ceiling effect against women in the global environment, whereby female leaders have less expatriate access to jobs and less international experience than male leaders. The authors consider this lack of access to be another form of gender bias that forces some women to change their behaviours to a male template in order to fit the expatriate, international leadership stereotype.

One of the most important elements that have been found to be responsible for maintaining the glass ceiling effect and hindering the access of women to leadership positions in a wide spectrum of organisations is their process of hiring. It has been found that hiring decisions tend to depend on decision-makers' perceptions, rather than on

candidates' qualifications or expertise (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Male leaders use their position and power to hire and encourage the promotion of individuals who are like them, and since males dominate the leaderships of most organisations, male candidates rather than females are more likely to be the future leaders and to receive promotion.

A study by Carli and Eagly (2016) found that the glass ceiling effect was still prevalent and hampered the path of women to leadership and top management positions. Another important characteristic of the glass the ceiling is that it persists because it is invisible and people no longer acknowledge its presence. Therefore, the literature has suggested the presence of a new form of glass ceiling effect in modern institutions and organisations. AlDoubi (2014) reports that such new forms are visible through the concept of gender egalitarianism that is created and promoted by organisations as well as by countries. As a result, women around the world are facing a glass ceiling effect or gender gap, despite the global community acknowledging the need to end all kinds of organisational discrimination.

AlDoubi (2014) concurs with Schmitt et al. (2009) in identifying two main factors underlying this gender inequality, the first being the strategy of tokenism, whereby organisations and countries allow a few women to advance towards leadership positions in order to symbolise equal access and equal opportunities for all, although no such equality prevails in reality (Davis and Maldonado, 2015). The second factor is that such organisations and institutions compare the present numbers of women leaders with the situation in the past, offering evidence that women now have many more leadership opportunities than they once did (Carli and Eagly, 2016). These factors significantly affect the perceptions of people in organisations and in society at large while reducing women's motivation to support each other in order to seek equal access. Thus, it can be said that tokenism and comparison with the past are partly responsible for maintaining the glass ceiling effect in modern organisations (AlDoubi, 2014).

If the glass ceiling effect is viewed through the critical lens of social role theory, many social barriers are also seen to lie behind its formation and persistence. It has been found that society tends to prefer stereotypical male traits over female ones for leadership positions, so men are generally considered more competent than women (Harrison, Leitch and McAdam, 2015). According to AlDoubi (2014), when men in a leadership position are

identified as agentic, they are seen as competent, whereas when women leaders are agentic, they are seen as hostile and less likeable. Parenthood and self-selection are other significant factors that have been identified under social role theory, according to which women often self-select to opt-out of the mobility of leadership because of their motherhood requirements. Women are considered more emotional than men and lacking competence, again contributing to the glass ceiling effect (AlDoubi, 2014; Harrison, Leitch and McAdam, 2015).

3.4.4 Glass ceiling effect in different countries

The metaphor of the glass ceiling is useful in understanding and assessing the impenetrable barriers that separate women from senior leadership or executive positions (Jain and Mukherji, 2010). Very few women are able to reach such positions in most companies, due to invisible barriers that may occur as the result of culture, social perceptions of women, their social status, lack of efforts to support their career advancement, the rigidity of organisational structure and resistance to the development of women, among others. In 1995, the US Department of Labor's Glass Ceiling Commission found that only three to five per cent of senior management or leadership positions in organisations were held by women and that even when they did hold such positions, their compensation remained lower than that of men occupying the same positions (Johns, 2013).

The glass ceiling effect has been recognised as a significant element in understanding the problem of women's career advancement. Throughout the world, the effective participation of women leaders at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life will come only with equal opportunity (Osborn, Cutter and Ullah, 2015). Despite the increased participation of women in higher education and in the global labour force (UN, 2015), women systematically fail to reach higher-level positions. Regardless of their educational qualifications and achievements, their path to leadership remains very difficult and strewn with barriers (Bolat et al., 2011). Latha, Bhavan and Balasubramanian (2017) studied the glass ceiling effect among women employees in Asian countries and found that very few top management and leadership positions were held by women there in comparison to Western countries.

Among the factors that affect women's career advancement are cultural values and cultural attitudes towards women. They may also include the geopolitical conditions in the country. For instance, it was evident that the glass ceiling effect in Iraq was influenced by political and social conditions, as women were restricted in many work areas because of the problems of security and stability. Some other factors contributing to the effect were lack of opportunities for women within organisations and the traditions and customs of Iraq. This resulted in lower participation of women in high-income activities and clearly explains the operation of a glass ceiling effect (Looney, 2005). Social and cultural barriers to women's advancement are also evident in Jordan, influencing public perceptions of their capabilities and constituting a glass ceiling effect which prevents them from assuming leadership positions despite their increased participation in the labour force, according to Al-Manasra (2013). The same study found that women in Jordan were capable of balancing their family and work life, hence showing no evidence of a glass ceiling effect related to family obligations that might affect their career advancement, but it identified various organisational practices that did affect decisions makers' attitudes towards women's capabilities. Decisions were mostly taken by men, who were more likely to have cultural perceptions typical of the country and to develop a male culture in their organisations. Their perceptions of women's leadership capabilities were coloured by their belief that as men, they were able to perform better than women (Al-Manasra, 2013).

Another study identified the effect of the glass ceiling on the careers and advancement to leadership positions of Lebanese women (Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine, 2005). It found that they faced similar barriers to those affecting women in Iraq or any other Asian country. The cultural and traditional environment of the country and its customs had a significant impact on the social behaviour and attitudes of its people. Women faced a higher rate of attitudinal constraints, such as a corporate culture that specifically favoured men, a lack of commitment shown by women and their exclusion from support networks and support mechanisms, arising from an organisational environment where a very significant glass ceiling effect hindered women's growth. Official policies in Oman encourage women to work shoulder to shoulder with men in the labour force, but there too, various barriers obstruct the paths of women seeking to reach senior leadership positions, according to Goveas and Aslam (2011). The main elements of this instance of the glass ceiling effect

which they identify are the conservative mindset of people in the Arab region, the inferior self-image of women, the absence of well-developed and structured human resource policies, work-family conflicts and a lack of professional networks among women.

In the UAE, despite its patriarchal social structures and tribal customs, the government has taken many progressive steps and developed many policies to empower Emirati women. Official initiatives have resulted in the significantly increased participation of women in the workforce and in leadership positions in higher education (Alibeli, 2015). A recent study in the UAE identified four different career development types for women as “progressive”, “moderate”, “idealistic” and “facilitated” (Miller, Kyriazi and Paris, 2017, p. 30). The first two categories apply specifically to women from middle-class families and the other two to those from upper-class families, showing that the level of social connection is very significant in explaining the career advancement status of women in the UAE. Miller et al. (2017) further conclude that some women have important family connections which help to advance their careers. For example, upper-class women will have family connections with other people from the upper or executive class, improving their opportunity to take senior-level or leadership positions in organisations on the basis of these connections, whereas middle-class women may not reach top-level positions because they lack such connections, amounting to a significant glass ceiling effect for them.

Tharenou (2014) offers an explanatory analysis involving self-identified expatriation. Increasing numbers of women in the UAE self-identify as expatriates, enabling them to take higher-level positions on the basis of their educational qualifications and their employment background. Hutchings and Michailova (2017) agree that such female leaders are able to take better positions abroad and are free from gender discrimination in their own countries. This is thus an effective career path for women to achieve their aspirations without any glass ceiling effect (Tharenou, 2014). Other studies in the region have, however, identified the glass ceiling effect as still significant in hampering the career advancement of women. Those living in the Kingdom of Bahrain, for example, were found by Pillai, Prasad and Thomas (2011) to still face a significant effect resulting from poor education and skills, lack of opportunities to develop the skills that are important for higher-level leadership positions and an inability to manage the balance between work and family life.

A major gender gap identified in the literature is the underrepresentation of women in employment and in leadership positions in various fields, including education. The economies of East Asian countries are advancing, yet women there are prevented by the glass ceiling effect from attaining leadership positions. For instance, women in China are significantly underrepresented in higher management positions and educational leadership, being less highly valued than their male counterparts and having fewer opportunities for career advancement (Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Zhao and Jones, 2017). Although the women's employment rate in China has increased to the point where three women in every four are participating in the workforce, very few are able to exercise top management decision-making power or to progress to senior leadership positions in educational institutions including universities (Wang, Yue and Yu, 2013). Other studies of the glass ceiling effect have found that women in the labour force are often unable to rise above the lower positions and that one barrier to their career advancement is their low educational level compared with men (Wang et al., 2013).

In South Korea, women suffer from gender stereotyping and discrimination, reducing their chances of achieving career advancement to leadership positions (Cook and Glass, 2014). The aspirations of Asian women are reported by Kang and Rowley (2005) to be very high, which means that even their family responsibilities and obligations have relatively little influence on these aspirations, but they are still unable to maintain a satisfactory family-work balance. Therefore, the major element of the glass ceiling effect for women in South Korea is their inability to maintain a work-life balance, making them unable to commit to the demands of higher-level positions (Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian, 2017). The glass ceiling effect can be better understood by integrating the concept with that of the global environment. For example, the case of North Korea is different, as the participation of women in the country has increased, and after the collapse of the state-run socialist economy in the 1990s, the opportunities for women to participate in the economy have increased (Lankov and SeokHyang, 2014).

With the exception of China, the participation of women in the educational sector has increased in East Asian countries (Ng and Sears, 2017). Meanwhile, the lack of developmental opportunities for women clearly shows the operation of a glass ceiling effect in organisations in Singapore and Malaysia. Indeed, organisational culture is one of

the most significant barriers for the advancement of women living in Singapore and Malaysia, providing the most significant evidence in support of the glass ceiling theory (Dimovski, Skerlavaj and Man, 2010). By its very nature, however, the glass ceiling effect often goes unnoticed and women are unable to determine whether their career growth or access to leadership positions have been affected by particular factors associated with culture, tradition or social factors. For instance, it was found that Singaporean women failed to reach leadership positions and would even leave the workforce in order to fulfil their maternal responsibilities. The advent of motherhood often results in their permanent exit from the workforce (Yoon, 2015). Yukongdi and Benson (2005) state that the culture of Indonesia is mainly influenced by Islam and Islamic traditions and is patriarchal. Therefore, women living there not only have to face organisational constraints but are also victims of the prevailing masculine culture. As the work environment in the educational sector tends to be correspondingly masculine, women in education are subject to the resistance of men in the form of a glass ceiling effect (Yukongdi and Benson, 2005). According to Retnaningsih (2013), the culture of Indonesia perceives someone to be less than a "whole woman" (p. 63) if she deviates from the responsibilities assigned to her through culture or tradition, such as being a wife, bearing children and taking responsibility for caring for the family. Therefore, tradition and culture, mediated by the perceptions of society at large, constitute a glass ceiling effect obstructing women's path towards achieving senior management or leadership positions.

The significant glass ceiling effect holding back women in Asian countries is also evident in the case of Thailand, where women find that many interpersonal, individual, societal and organisational factors act as barriers to their advancement, so that very few are able to achieve leadership positions in the educational sector and in many other fields (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015). Individual factors and personality traits can sometimes be ignored when discussing the glass ceiling effect (Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian, 2017). These factors are associated with a person's ability to work within a team and develop a personal network. However, the problems of gender stereotyping and the restriction of women are often barriers that women are unable to cross.

In other Asian countries with a collective and highly traditional culture, including Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, women's main responsibility is to stay at home to take

care of their families, while men are expected to work outside the home and earn money to support them. However, a paradigm shift in recent decades has changed the perception of society towards the roles of men and women, with a new understanding of the significance of education and of supporting women in their career choices. In Afghanistan, there has been a greater acceptance of the modern approach, allowing women to work outside the home in order to support their families, but society remains under the influence of male dominance and supposed male superiority, perpetuating the glass ceiling effect (Kaifi and Mujtaba, 2011).

The participation of women in the workforce is also increasing in India (De Jonge, 2015). However, it remains a major problem that women are able to achieve only lower management positions, even if they have significant qualifications and educational attainment. Thus, despite their attendance at the many universities and colleges in India, very few women rise to senior leadership or decision-making positions (Lau, 2010). Further evidence of the glass ceiling effect is that women are usually paid less than men. Again, the underlying cause is that men believe that a career is a secondary consideration for women and that the family remains her primary responsibility. The idea of a woman being the breadwinner for the family is firmly rejected by most men, although they also deny the existence of the glass ceiling effect (Jain and Mukherji, 2010).

Similarly, Morley (2013) reports that the existence of a glass ceiling effect has some negative impacts on the career advancement of women in Pakistan, despite the educational sector undergoing significant changes in recent decades, with increasing participation of women in education and educational employment. The glass ceiling effect is still evident through an “academic meritocracy” (Morley, 2013, p. 119), which prevents many women from reaching leadership positions in higher education. It has also been found that there is a relentless misconception in Islamic culture about the leadership capabilities of women (Morley, 2013). In a more recent study, Morley and Crossouard (2015) report on the different responses of Pakistani organisations and Pakistani men to the glass ceiling effect, noting that gender discrimination is the main barrier that women face in Pakistan. They also found a stereotyped identification of women’s leadership as lying in the private or domestic realms rather than the professional sphere, as their primary role was associated with nurturing and caring for the family. Female leaders themselves

who participated in the study identified their leadership roles in these limited areas only, having accepted the cultural norms underlying the above stereotyping. Women were found to hold some leadership positions in the colleges of Pakistan, but not in other parts of the education field. Furthermore, the leadership and decision-making capacities of women in colleges were often undermined by male administrative or financial staff (Morley and Crossouard, 2015). There is a prevalence of ethnocentric understanding of educational leadership which reflects the cultural backgrounds of those interpreting the roles of leaders (Shah, 2006). Shah and Sobehart (2008) thus identify the patriarchal society of Pakistan as the major cause of gender segregation in its education system and of the glass ceiling effect for women.

According to Morley and Crossouard (2015), women also face challenges related to the glass ceiling effect in nearby Sri Lanka, where the division of labour in the universities is gendered. For example, women are often unpromoted and restricted to non-research roles that limit their opportunity for advancement to senior positions in HEIs. Thus, the glass ceiling phenomenon exerts a moderate to very strong negative effect on the career advancement of women and their ability to achieve higher leadership positions in many Asian countries, as a result of traditional cultural attitudes to women's capabilities.

3.4.5 Glass ceiling effect in Saudi Arabia

Women in Arab societies, regardless of their positions in the public and private sectors, are considered inferior and subordinate to men, even when better qualified (Hamdan, 2005). This scenario is strongly replicated in Saudi Arabian leadership positions, and the decision-making roles are predominantly male. Saudi men are in charge of running all aspects of national life, regardless of their qualifications, even though qualified, educated women are available. The highest leadership position Saudi women can reach, especially in higher education, is serving as a deputy to their male counterparts. This form of glass ceiling effect created by the cultural perception of women's roles as assistants to men constrains their advancement and professional growth. Until it is recognised and addressed, the status quo for Saudi women will remain the same (AlMunajjed, 1997, 2010; Hamdan, 2005).

Many educated and professional Saudi women, who have failed to achieve top management and leadership positions, have felt that the root cause of the glass ceiling

effect is that most organisations and institutions are formed by men and are influenced by male experiences (AlDoubi, 2014). Therefore, the experience, expertise and capabilities of women in such institutions are treated as secondary (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). However, there are a variety of barriers that contribute to the glass ceiling effect, ensuring that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions. In various countries around the globe, the problem of the glass ceiling is attributed to social, cultural and organisational barriers (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). It is also evident that most of the leadership theories propounded in the literature originated in a male-dominated or male-centred view of leadership which belittles the qualities of women, thus initiating or reinforcing the glass ceiling effect (Davis and Maldonado, 2015).

Al-Manasra (2013) analyses the glass ceiling effect as comprising three elements: the glass cliff, organisational justice and work-life balance. Women in Saudi Arabia are ranked lowest in achieving higher positions within organisations. Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian (2017) found that only 0.1 per cent of women in Saudi Arabia are able to reach leadership positions, indicating that the glass ceiling effect is very strong in the Kingdom. In this respect, while the effect exists in many countries around the world, the significantly lower representation of Saudi women in leadership positions indicates that its impact is greater in Saudi Arabia than in many other countries.

3.5 Barriers to leadership

Many of the findings of studies in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, bear a close resemblance to the significant barriers to leadership experienced by women in other parts of the world (Morley, 2013a; Reilly and Quirin, 2015). More specifically, for example, studies in Western contexts similarly highlight obstacles such as masculinised organisational cultures (Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Leathwood and Read, 2009) that bind men together into a hierarchy in which they can flourish (Fenton 2003). Patriarchal cultures that privilege masculine leadership traits lie beneath the misrecognition of women's leadership capabilities (Morley, 2013b) and low perceptions of their capabilities as leaders (Benschop and Brouns, 2003). The qualities expected for leadership become normalised in recruitment processes, putting women at a disadvantage (Grummell et al., 2009) and

excluding them from social and professional networks (Fotaki, 2013). Other obstacles include limited role models, mentoring and leadership training and development for women (Morley, 2013a). Studies in Western contexts also point to bias in performance evaluation (Fletcher et al., 2007). Thus, women in the Western world experience marginalisation and devaluation (Fotaki, 2013) comparable in many ways to women in the Middle East. Extensive research also shows that women suffer the double burden of family obligations (Probert, 2005); even for women without such responsibilities, "the abjected maternal body is displaced onto all women (whether they are mothers or not)" and "conflated with the feminine" (Fotaki, 2013, p. 1257).

Marinakou (2014) identifies a radical change in women's access to leadership positions and in more effective managerial leadership styles that have changed the perspectives of people in the Middle East over the last 50 years, but a survey of women in leadership suggests that half of the female leaders perceive that there are obstacles to them occupying management positions and that their advancement rate is inferior to that of men in every sector (Alsuwaida, 2016). The barriers were seen to be related to factors including prejudice, family demands, discrimination and stereotypes; therefore, the majority of men and women alike felt that training and education would be the best ways to enhance the preparedness of women for various leadership roles (Alsuwaida, 2016). This shows that leadership style and organisational effectiveness can be combined in a positive framework.

3.5.1 Organisational barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia

Despite the extensive expansion of the roles and responsibilities of Saudi Arabian women, evidence indicates that they still face many challenges and barriers to reaching upper management or leadership positions (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Women are subject to many structural and cultural limitations that make the reality of their career advancement different from that of their male counterparts (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The major organisational barrier is that women in Saudi Arabia receive very few opportunities for growth and development in the workplace (Kattan et al., 2016). Firstly, studies have found that women have very limited higher education options, as although they are free of many traditional and cultural restrictions, they remain restricted in their choice of subjects. One

consequence is that after graduating from higher education, one of their few employment options is to work in the education sector (Almunajjed, 2010). At the same time, organisations have very discriminatory appointment procedures and promotion options because of the traditional attitudes of male leaders towards the women working for them (Almunajjed, 2010). Other organisational barriers that women face are the male domination of the sector, the resistance of men to women in management and a lack of appropriate policies and legislation for encouraging the participation of women in organisational management (Kattan et al., 2016).

Women in Saudi Arabia are significantly affected by the stereotypes and prejudicing mindset of the general public (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Men tend to have the mindset that women should be restricted to taking care of the family; therefore, women receive very little support from family members in their career advancement (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). The literature (see, for example, Hodges, 2017; Al Ghamdi, 2016) suggests that women are not empowered enough to make their own decisions and to advance their careers in the face of such prejudice. Their professional abilities and leadership skills are significantly associated with their family background, self-confidence and ability to stand up for their rights. The organisational barriers to career advancement are also affected by the social institutions of family, schools and the media, which play significant roles in perpetuating the negative values and attitudes towards women's careers and their role in society. There are also various challenges to women as leaders associated with structural factors arising from the management and organisational practices which strictly limit women's opportunities to exercise power (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

To answer research questions concerning discrimination in the recruitment and promotion process, how Saudi women see themselves as leaders and their relationship with the place of work, Hodges (2017) interviewed 25 professional women in Saudi Arabia regarding their experience and perceptions of the challenges that women face in achieving senior-level positions. The study found that restrictions to the authority allotted to women in organisations limited them to the lower management positions. Structural challenges are very significant for Saudi Arabian women, constraining their authority at work and forcing them to operate under the umbrella of male domination. For example, the requirements of board meetings mean that any women appointed to a top leadership position would

preside at meetings involving male leaders. Men's resentment of such a structure would often lead to resistance against women's accession to leadership positions. This situation further impacts their performance negatively and also increases the psychological pressure to prove themselves. Further organisational barriers are constant interference by men and the restriction of freedom to make decisions (Hodges, 2017).

Other studies have identified many policy enhancements and provisions that have been made to improve the situation of women in employment in Saudi Arabia, indicating that the private sector has begun to appreciate the significance of female participation in the workplace (Arar and Oplatka, 2016). Despite positive steps taken by the government and policymakers, however, women are poorly empowered and Saudi Arabia still scores very poorly in terms of women's participation in the workforce and career advancement (Gorney, 2016). A limited improvement was achieved between 2011 and 2015, when the economic participation of women in the workforce increased to 13% (AccountAbility, 2017), but despite the increasing participation of women in the economy of the country, few are able to reach leadership positions, the major barriers being structural ones, namely the centralisation of decision making, lack of female participation in the formulation of strategy and lack of authority (Thompson, 2015). According to a study by Al-Kayed (2015), one reason for the slow progress of women towards leadership positions is that their participation in senior management is a very recent phenomenon and there are still concerns about their leadership skills, managerial efficiency and capabilities. Al-Kayed (2015) also asserts that cultural obstacles to the growth of women are less important than other challenges. This view indicates the changing perceptions of the role of females in society and reflects the new policies that demand the presence of women in decision-making roles (Thompson, 2015). Women are trapped between a lack of authority and the dominance of men in their departments. The study of Gonaim (2016) focuses on departmental leadership. Occupying department chairs is a significant part of educational leadership in Saudi Arabia, as it requires appropriate education, skills and expertise. These positions are crucial, because the individuals occupying them have to maintain a balance between the faculty members and the senior management. This requires a participative management style which is more likely to be an attribute of females than males (Eagly, 2007).

Gonaim (2016) also examined the concept of leadership from an Islamic perspective, finding that according to Islam there is no difference between men and women in terms of duties, responsibilities, or playing leadership roles. Gonaim's (2016) study confirms that the empowerment of women at work is a very significant component of contemporary leadership practices. However, the centralised system in Saudi Arabia offers few opportunities for women's empowerment (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013) and Saudi Arabian women may not be as authoritative in management, due to a cultural environment which allocates more authority to men. In addition to lacking authority, they also face a lack of clarity about the organisational relationship between male and female departments within individual organisations, which is clouded by poor coordination (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). This goes some way to explaining the overall poor state of coordination and communication in the workplace and lack of control over material and financial resources. Poor communication also widens the gap between senior leaders and women's sections, which are often isolated "from the course of events that take place at the corporate headquarters, and the lack of participation in strategic planning and academic decision-making and membership in academic and administrative committees" (Al-Ahmadi, 2011, p. 153). One result is that issues which women need to highlight are often overlooked, as they have no direct representation at decision-making levels. Therefore, there is a lack of collaborative effort towards modifying organisational structures that are influenced by culture and tradition, with leaders and male management personnel tending to resist the inclusion of females in decision making and strategic planning. Since women are not empowered in their personal and professional lives, they significantly lack the ability to make decisions and are unable to achieve organisational goals because they lack resources, skills and empowerment (Al Alhareth, Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir, 2015).

Conversely, women's empowerment can be achieved through access to better resources and knowledge; in particular, a useful strategy to empower women in Saudi Arabian educational organisations would be to provide them with sufficient authority and better access to information (Kattan et al., 2016). The authority and access to a wide range of information will make them confident and independent in their individual lives and profession. The literature, therefore, suggests that self-development, encouragement and rewards could also be used in the workplace for the development and empowerment of

women because of the lack of mentor support and supervision. A final organisational barrier is thus the resistance of men in senior management to provide training and mentoring for women (Kattan et al., 2016).

3.5.2 Personal barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia

The literature also identifies many personal barriers to women's succession to leadership positions in the education sector of Saudi Arabia. Women's personalities can be seen to be significantly affected by their social circumstances and their personal experiences of a restrictive society, thus tending to affect their leadership behaviour and skills. They may be unable to exercise leadership effectively because of poor self-confidence, fear of taking responsibility and difficulty in maintaining a balance between family obligations and professional responsibilities (Tlaiss, 2014). Women in Saudi Arabia also have the sense of being isolated when they reach administrative positions, because of the structural and organisational challenges referred to in the previous subsection as isolating women's departments. Saudi women are therefore more likely to be subject to mental and psychological pressure from social, professional and cultural sources (Marinakou, 2014).

These personal barriers to the career advancement of women are significantly higher than organisational barriers (Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair, 2017), suggesting that people's attitudes and beliefs are also shaped by their cultural and social circumstances. Therefore, women in Saudi Arabia, having been subjected to many cultural and social restrictions since childhood, may lack belief in their own personal capabilities and strengths. The work of Shabbir et al. (2017) suggests that there is a perception of low self-efficacy that women often develop towards themselves, which constitutes a major barrier to their career development. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the legal and social status of women in many Muslim countries is considered to be limited by them being restricted to the roles of wives and mothers whose main route to earning social approval is to marry and reproduce. Thus, their status remains essentially limited to their domestic responsibilities (Marinakou, 2014). However, their personal views of their ability to exercise leadership may be somewhat negative, as revealed by a survey conducted by Albakry (2016), who also found that the quality of leadership training significantly affected the abilities of women.

Women's lack of self-confidence is, in turn, a significant factor that results in fear of taking professional responsibility. Social pressure and traditional culture thus tend to prevent the development of proper leadership attitudes and values among women (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Another problem associated with women's personal characteristics is that of role conflict, as they attempt to balance their professional and personal lives. This is mainly due to the lack of structural support within organisations, which makes it difficult for women to meet both their family obligations and professional demands (Kattan et al., 2016). Another theme identified in terms of personal barriers is the feeling of suffering and frustration caused by the increasing pressure of dual roles and sense of marginalisation (Kattan et al., 2016). Women often feel themselves to be inferior, because they have been brought up in an environment where men are considered superior and women are required to be passive and submissive (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a mix of many personality traits that impact women's leadership and their ability to acquire senior management and leadership positions. It has been found that a lack of information and inclusion for women results in them lacking the managerial skills and knowledge that are required to exercise leadership (Al Ghamdi, 2016).

There is empirical evidence that a lack of legislation, regulation and standards prevails in terms of women's organisational roles and responsibilities (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al Ghamdi, 2016; Alomair, 2015; Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan, 2017). From the anthropological perspective, evidence has been collected to show that there are societies around the world that display unequal access to resources, power and prestige (Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan, 2017). It has also been found that over time, many societies have developed a culture that favours masculinity and has a negative perception of feminism (Kattan et al., 2016). Perversely, social and economic development has tended to strengthen this gender stereotyping, with women being increasingly perceived as outsiders in society and at work (Kattan et al., 2016).

Prevailing gender stereotypes have shaped differing views of Saudi women's capacities, abilities and skills, in general, at home and the workplace (Dirani, Hamie and Tlaiss, 2017). Therefore, any woman who aspires to leadership or a senior management position in Saudi Arabia must overcome the childhood socialisation that significantly discourages and suppresses the development of some important leadership qualities. This is particularly

evident in gender-segregated societies like Saudi Arabia. Kattan et al. (2016) also refer to "a popular perception of the maleness of leadership (…) which tangibly reduce(s) the chance she will be judged qualified" for leadership and hence accepted as a leader. Thus, stereotyping affects women's psychology and their thinking about their own abilities (AlDoubi, 2014). Women often lack power and hierarchy in the workplace and those who lead or aspire to do so lack authority because of their gender-moderated social status. Even when women do acquire leadership positions in Saudi Arabian workplaces, they significantly lack power and are prevented from making decisions (AlDoubi, 2014).

3.6 Theoretical explanations of the various barriers affecting Saudi women

Organisational barriers are very significant in creating a glass ceiling effect which prevents women from rising to upper-level positions. Situation theorists have focused on the environments in which women work, specifically those who aspire to upper management or leadership positions (Kiaye and Singh, 2013). If the corporate environment and culture are supportive of women, they will provide the flexible work schedules necessary for women with family responsibilities to make an effective contribution at work, and their prospects of gaining senior positions may thereby improve (Jain and Mukherji, 2010). However, as their contribution is significantly associated with the workplace environment and opportunities, they are also affected negatively by an unsupportive corporate culture, which in turn is influenced by unsupportive policies and procedures (Jain and Mukherji, 2010). Such a culture can also be considered to form a barrier via the glass ceiling effect, since it may be invisible within the organisation but can have a significant negative effect on the career growth of women. Another barrier displaying the glass ceiling effect in organisations is the lack of work opportunities. Women in Saudi Arabia have far fewer opportunities at the workplace to display their potential and capabilities because of an underlying perception of them as incapable (Sikdar and Mitra, 2012). Situational theory is quite useful in explaining organisational barriers such as the glass ceiling but it does not explain personal and cultural barriers and hence was not considered suitable for this research.

Organisations dominated and led by males often exclude women from making important decisions. This explains the metaphor of the labyrinth, according to which women start facing barriers to their career advancements as soon as they rise to middle management positions (Carli and Eagly, 2016), which denies them the opportunity to participate in different decision-making roles within organisations (Sikdar and Mitra, 2012). Thus, corporate culture often favours men and male-led functions, while women are deprived of the opportunities to display their skills and capabilities. The male-dominated society of Saudi Arabia also restricts women to specific roles and does not provide them with the opportunities to prove their abilities. Therefore, it is said that Saudi Arabia is a society where most people prefer male leadership, which inhibits women from entering into competition with men, and this amounts to a very acute situation in the Kingdom (Yukongdi and Benson, 2005). Women also have to face the insufficiencies in corporate culture and practices arising from cultural and traditional restrictions which oblige them to keep their distance from men, such that they are denied the very important benefits of networking. Other problems are a lack of mentoring and the inflexibility of working hours. Since the culture of the country considers women to be fundamentally incapable, they additionally suffer from inadequate training, as organisations are reluctant to invest in the enhancement of their skills (Hutchings et al., 2010).

There are many other barriers which can be said to contribute to the glass ceiling effect typically operating in Saudi Arabian organisations and specifically in educational institutions, where women lack supportive corporate culture mechanisms (Hutchings et al., 2010). In the masculine culture of the Kingdom, the gender gap is very wide and few equal opportunities exist (Bolat, Bolat and Kiliç, 2011). Labyrinth theory asserts that there is no single or monolithic factor that prevents women from rising to top-level positions; rather, there are various reasons including the bias towards men and the tendency to see them as natural leaders (Eagly et al., 2007). Most organisations have only males as senior managers and leaders, who favour other men within the organisation (Bombuwela and Alwis, 2013). Women affected by the work culture and work environment also develop negative perceptions of them and therefore become uninterested in developing self-efficacy (Appelbaum, Asham and Argheyd, 2011a).

Even when women do manage to climb the hierarchical ladder to senior positions, the glass ceiling effect increases with each step towards the top (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010). The constraints and barriers that they face worsen as they rise higher. Women reaching mid-level positions have to face the problems of inflexible working hours, increased responsibility and greater difficulty in managing their work-life balance, which can be associated with the barriers as explained under labyrinth theory. Although males also encounter such difficulties, it is women who have more responsibility for managing the work-life balance and feeding their children and family, so that they are much more likely than men to face these issues when they reach a higher position in their jobs and careers (Kattan et al., 2016).

This situation may also give rise to the problem of perceived lack of commitment; and organisations may perceive women as incapable of taking on more responsibilities (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011), despite this supposed lack of commitment being contradicted by the positions already attained by women in the organisation and their personal aspirations. As noted above, women also lack opportunities to develop informal networks, largely because of gender segregation (Sikdar and Mitra, 2012; Qureshi, 2014). Organisations often lack policies and guidelines to support and promote women's growth. The main purpose of the policies which do exist is to justify gender segregation, giving more freedom to males.

Women can be as ambitious as men regarding their careers and professional development, yet organisational practices respecting and promoting the male-dominated culture deny them adequate opportunities to pursue their ambitions (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Therefore, such practices contribute to the glass ceiling effect in Saudi Arabia, as do the unstructured human resources (HR) policies and strategies (Tlaiss and Elamin, 2016). One major reason for this problem is the highly conservative social environment, which constrains various work practices (Al-Asfour et al., 2017).

Women who aspire to become leaders are not supported by leadership training programmes (Siddique, Khan and Zia, 2016). Therefore, organisational policies fail to deliver equal opportunities for women (Pillai et al., 2011). In recent years, there has been growing awareness among the women of Saudi Arabia of their fundamental education and employment rights; indeed, they now play a major role in the labour market. However, the

pervasive social and organisational culture continues to limit the scope, growth and participation of women.

According to Bal, Kooij and De Jong (2013), in order to advance their careers, women are required to go through various stages in their organisations and this often means gaining more experience and developing knowledge of several professional fields. The same goes for the males as they also gain experience and knowledge of various fields, but women face more difficulties than the men, as they have less business experience and have family-related work to do as well. Their career advancement is further affected by many situational factors. For example, Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair (2017) assert that in order to gain equal status, women are required to display higher standards of work than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, the lack of well-respected positions for women with the same compensation and benefits as those offered to males in similar positions and with identical educational backgrounds constitutes a barrier to their career advancement. The glass ceiling effect is often considered to be unofficial in Saudi Arabian organisations, but it is actually a very significant obstacle for women's advancement to upper management or leadership positions, mainly due to the dissemination of prejudices based on gender stereotypes.

A study by Kauser and Tlaiss (2011) found that "cultural values, societal practices, and stereotypical viewpoints towards the role of women in Arab countries are seen to impact on the structures and practices of organisations that employ these women" (p. 38). Notably, cultural and societal norms remain patriarchal and a clear difference in gender roles is still prevalent in these organisations, where women, therefore, continue to find that the glass ceiling effect significantly hampers their professional growth.

Throughout the world today, women find that various barriers are created or imposed on them by men. Their career progression is often affected by family responsibilities, cultural and religious roles, the inability to relocate, gender stereotypes and low participation in making decisions about their own lives, all of which are elements of the glass ceiling effect that women are unable to overcome. Among the various theories that have been used to explain this phenomenon, the person-centred theory is concerned with the skills, traits and behaviours of women that are significant in their attempts to break through the glass ceiling. Terjesen and Singh (2008) assert that ambition, confidence, assertiveness and

influencing behaviour are important leadership qualities that women specifically lack and which are more evident in males. While this gender difference may be true empirically, its causes may lie in the personal, cultural and organisational barriers imposed on females. Women in Asian countries, including India and Pakistan, for example, often prefer to avoid involvement in competition, because of their dislike of competitive environments (Jain and Mukherji, 2010). This rejection of the competitive environment can be a significant barrier to their accession to leadership, because leaders are expected to have strong skills in competitive engagement (Terjesen and Singh, 2008). Along with this negative attitude towards competition, Bombuwela and Alwis (2013) list a lack of confidence among the personal barriers to the progress of women toward leadership or higher positions. One of the major problems that create the glass ceiling effect is women's negative self-image, i.e. their perception of themselves as inferior, manifested in a belief that they are incapable of gaining social and financial independence.

Family restrictions and women's perceptions of their family and career roles also constitute personal barriers contributing to the glass ceiling effect. Women are required to be submissive and dependent on males from childhood, and this dependency is expected to persist throughout adulthood. Al-Asfour et al. (2017) explain that women are traditionally and socially restricted and despite some recent changes they remain limited to working in female-oriented fields, which limits their options for working in different positions and achieving career advancement. Women are allowed to work in the education field, but are largely restricted to entry-level and mid-level positions because of the traditional glass ceiling effect, as can be seen in the proportion of women at different management level positions in Saudi Arabia discussed above. Elamin and Omair (2010) argue robustly that the problem is not religious in origin, as Islamic teaching actually encourages women's economic participation; rather, "women's main problems are due to social, economic and legal practices which are deeply rooted in a culture that is neither Islamic in spirit nor in conformity with (its) ideals" (p. 748). Therefore, women may be less enthusiastic towards achieving higher and better positions within organisations because the cultural glass ceiling effect creates barriers and shapes the psychology of women regarding their own abilities. The reality of gender differences has been accepted by women in Saudi Arabia, very few of whom therefore try to achieve better positions at work.

Cultural and social barriers thus reduce the occupational self-efficacy of women and create a glass ceiling of personal barriers. A participant in a study by Al-Asfour et al. (2017) admitted that while women can become teachers in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia, it is very difficult for them to reach the higher position of principal. This statement confirms that women have developed personal barriers which contribute to the glass ceiling effect, by accepting that achieving leadership or higher positions is impossible for them. Another participant complained that women are provided with limited opportunities for career advancement and restricted in the occupations open to them. This situation creates a sense of limitation in women, again contributing to the glass ceiling effect that restricts their attempts to achieve higher positions (Al-Asfour et al., 2017).

The culture and traditions of Saudi Arabia have also impacted women's psychological empowerment, which makes a very significant contribution to explaining an individual's intrinsic task motivation. Psychological motivation can be said to have four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Al Ghamdi, 2016). In the context of self-empowerment, meaning can be understood as the level to which an individual cares about or believes in the purpose of achieving something (Rawat, 2011). Therefore, for Saudi women, it can be understood as their personal belief in their skills and in the goal of achieving leadership positions. Psychological empowerment influences the individual to improve her performance and achieve her goals (Rawat, 2011). The meaning of empowerment also emphasises the purposes or goals that are established through a person's own ideals and standards. According to Wang and Lee (2009), the meaning of psychological empowerment is associated with work roles and with individual values and beliefs which encourage the individual to achieve her goals. When an individual woman fails to identify her purposes, goals, values and beliefs, this will exacerbate the personal barriers to achievement which contribute to the glass ceiling effect.

The second dimension of psychological empowerment is competence, which is also an element of motivation. Competence generates the feeling of having the capacity to complete a task or responsibility, thus strengthening personal motivation (Stander and Rothmann, 2010). An individual feels confident and competent when she has the intrinsic motivation and the capacity to fulfil a particular responsibility with proficiency. The third dimension of psychological empowerment, self-determination, is the sense of causal

responsibility that an individual has towards a given task. Self-determination at work arises when the individual has the liberty to determine how to meet her job-related responsibilities and how she can aspire to a better position (Stander and Rothmann, 2010). Self-determination helps a person to develop a sense of autonomy and generates the feeling of being trusted. Impact, which is the final dimension of psychological empowerment, is mainly associated with the experience that an individual gains through participation in achieving the operational, administrative or strategic outcomes of the organisation. This helps in developing the sense that one has the ability to make a difference. Individuals who are psychologically empowered feel that they can contribute to achieving results and can reach the positions that they aspire to. Therefore, psychological empowerment depends closely on interpersonal empowerment; the individual's perceptions of psychological empowerment are often shaped by the organisational climate.

Thus, the lack of psychological empowerment can also contribute to the glass ceiling effect for Saudi women by creating personal barriers. Al Ghamdi (2016) found psychological empowerment among women working in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia to be very low. Those women working as leaders in educational institutions also lacked a sense of meaning, self-determination, competence and impact (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Earlier, Al-Magableh and Otoum (2014) concluded that women were unable to make meaning of their purpose and belief because of societal, religious and cultural restrictions. Their lack of purpose and goals restricted their access to leadership positions and contributed to the formation of the glass ceiling. Al Ghamdi (2016) associates personal motivation with self-determination and competence, which means that in the absence of these elements, women experience a lack of motivation to rise to leadership positions. Social and organisational factors alone are thus not responsible for the glass ceiling effect, which is also partly explained by women's lack of motivation and confidence. Conversely, motivation can be an important factor in counteracting the effect, because it can positively impact women's capabilities (Goveas and Aslam, 2011). Similar conclusions are reached by Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian (2017), who state that lack of motivation and goals are some of the personal barriers creating a glass ceiling for women. Their study further concludes that women's lack of motivation is due to their low psychological

empowerment. Another recent study, by Amon (2017), also identifies motivation as an important factor that can help women to reach leadership positions.

Women's psychological empowerment is also dependent on their relationships with others in the workplace and with their own work. They feel motivated when they are strongly connected with the work they do. This strong relationship of women with their work affects their strength in the administrative area and helps them to possess leadership capabilities (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Conversely, any women who lack psychological empowerment, motivation and competencies will not be able to achieve leadership status. Amon (2017) states that women's motivation is associated with social factors and social impact. The social culture and male-dominant society of Saudi Arabia affect the work activities and goals of women and directly affect their level of motivation, toughening the glass ceiling between them and the opportunity to reach the upper management level.

Therefore, it can be said that the lack of empowerment is a significant personal barrier to women's leadership as part of the glass ceiling effect (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Women are often inadequately prepared at home and at work to be appointed to the leadership of organisations and have limited opportunities to learn or to enhance their experience. Therefore, they often lack confidence in their own skills and capabilities and are correspondingly less determined to be appointed to leadership positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Women in Saudi Arabia, in common which those in other countries, have to play a dual role because of their family and work responsibilities, making their role in the workplace more stressful than that of men. The difficulty of managing their work-life balance can make their workload excessive and create a role conflict (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Women who work outside the home have still been found to retain household responsibilities, as social and cultural norms require them to undertake household chores and show that they are good mothers and wives, irrespective of other commitments. The consequent pressure may restrict their progress to higher management or leadership positions and significantly hamper their career growth (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015). They are most likely to resolve the role conflict arising from problems of managing the work-life balance by allowing the traditional interpretations of gender and gender roles to lead them to prioritise their family responsibilities. Thus, women's personal attitudes to their gender roles amount to a personal barrier to achieving leadership positions, again contributing to

the glass ceiling effect (Al Ghamdi, 2016; Al-Manasra 2013; Bombuwela and Alwis 2013; Jain and Mukherji, 2010). This mechanism is illustrated by the statement of a participant in the study of Al Ghamdi (2016) that she considered all of the family responsibilities to be her own, even if she was working outside the home. This is evidence that women have accepted their socially and culturally predetermined roles and that even when facing the challenge of managing a difficult work-life balance they are unaware of the glass ceiling effect created by their own personal barriers.

Yet another personal barrier identified as forming part of the glass ceiling for women in Saudi Arabia is lack of enthusiasm (Al-Manasra, 2013). Enthusiasm is very significant for a person to work towards personal career development. Women have to be enthusiastic about their personal growth in order to achieve leadership positions (Al-Manasra, 2013). Social and cultural factors remain the most significant elements of the glass ceiling effect that also influence the perceptions of working women and other women in their families. Under the influence of culture and religion, women in Saudi Arabia are often taught that they are expected to be dependent on men for their decisions and to obey the instructions of males in the household. This reduces women's confidence in their personal capabilities and increases their dependence on men. It is also a significant reason for the glass ceiling created by personal factors to remain invisible while continuing to restrict their career growth.

3.7 Women leaders enacting their roles in higher education

Women have to face many challenges and barriers constituting a glass ceiling between them and leadership positions in the universities of Saudi Arabia. Despite these significant challenges, however, a few women do hold leadership positions and enact their roles effectively, having developed various coping strategies against the glass ceiling effect and its component barriers. These women have been able to achieve leadership by displaying their abilities and strength while staunchly opposing the domination of men. The problem is that such women are far fewer in number in Saudi Arabia than would be expected from the increasingly strong representation of women in the education workforce. For example,

Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian (2017) found that only 0.1 per cent of women in Saudi Arabia are able to reach leadership positions.

Hodges (2017) provides many pieces of empirical evidence that women are working towards cracking the glass ceiling that once completely blocked their access to leadership positions, while also countering the factors that have tended to make their leadership ineffective. The study found that women feel that social and family support and encouragement are important for them to advance their careers and to enact leadership roles, so they are finding ways to meet both work and family obligations by developing resilience against all the odds. Indeed, women are developing the skills to hold leadership positions and working towards them by denying the operation of any glass ceiling effect (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017).

The denial of the glass ceiling effect is also associated with career satisfaction. Those women in Saudi Arabia who have been able to achieve leadership positions also tend to be satisfied with their career and work responsibilities, having developed a sense of acceptance of their own skills, competencies and strengths (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017). This is one of the major factors enabling women in Saudi Arabia to enact their leadership roles effectively and to operate efficiently in the higher education field (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017). Personal satisfaction with career and work responsibilities is very important for breaking through personal barriers (Al-Manasra, 2013).

Women's personal desires have also been significant in allowing them to fulfil their leadership roles with complete effectiveness (Mathis, 2010). Mathis suggests that the denial of the glass ceiling effect and the increased desire to attain career satisfaction has allowed females in Saudi Arabia to prove themselves as effective leaders. Career satisfaction is directly associated with desire, which also enhances women's resilience in countering the glass ceiling effect. Khalid, Magbool and Ayub (2017) found that women with low career satisfaction and low desire often had weak belief in themselves, illustrating the significance of enthusiasm, which can be either a barrier or a motivator for women (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015). Enthusiastic women leaders in Saudi Arabia tend to advance in their careers and to maintain their resilience and positive beliefs (Mathis, 2010).

Recognising that they cannot change cultural and social norms, women leaders in Saudi Arabia focus on developing self-efficacy, which can be described as the personal belief in

one's ability to achieve success. Successful women focus on developing their skills, knowledge and self-efficacy and have faith in themselves to fulfil their leadership responsibilities. Their self-efficacy is also related to their risk-taking behaviour (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017). The feeling of accomplishment that women obtain through their work and experience is beneficial in cracking the glass ceiling. Women's achievements in the workplace, honing skills and developing competencies, will positively affect their capabilities and encourage other women to make effective efforts to achieve higher positions in HEIs (Amon, 2017).

The resilience that female leaders have developed and their personal desires have helped them to access and exploit the resources they need for their career advancement and to set an example to others (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017). Women in Saudi Arabia give positive consideration to the social and legal restrictions when making career choices, which explains their preference for working in the field of education. For instance, Alsubaie and Jones (2017) predict that two royal decrees announced in 2017, one relaxing the guardianship law and the other removing the ban on women driving, will prove to have marked a turning point in the context of women's liberation in Saudi Arabia. Such social changes will be beneficial for women leaders.

Administrative capacity has also been identified as a significant positive factor in helping Saudi Arabian women to become effective leaders in higher education. Women are enhancing their creativity and innovativeness by taking advantage of cognitive components such as risk-taking, sensitivity, fluency and flexibility (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Such skills are allowing them to maintain their reputation within organisations and helping them to compete with their male counterparts. Organisational barriers are being addressed through knowledge and skill enhancement that may help women to break the glass ceiling effect (Khalid, Magbool and Ayub, 2017), although the impacts of these advances are not yet completely evident.

Women in Saudi Arabia are giving precedence to their professional achievement and success, not allowing themselves to be affected by social or cultural pressure to the extent that they once were. They may continue to find it difficult to achieve a work-life balance, but with determination and desire for success, women are overcoming many cultural and social barriers (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015). The competencies that many women are

developing to enact their roles as leaders are also making them role models for other women. The proportion of women graduating from HEIs in Saudi Arabia is increasing, broadening their prospects of achieving upper management positions (Abalkhail, 2017).

3.8 Research gaps

There is insufficient research on women's careers in Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia (Abalkhail, 2017). Whatever limited evidence is available clearly highlights the various barriers that Saudi Arabian women face in achieving leadership positions. A significant interest has been shown in studying the barriers affecting women in leadership in Saudi HEIs because the education system is the single largest employer of Saudi women (Alomair, 2015). Research into women in leadership in other countries is only partly applicable to Saudi Arabia because of several unique challenges to women leaders in that context. Therefore, the first research question that this research aims to answer is: ***Which critical barriers affect women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions?***

While Saudi Arabia has been criticised for its overly restrictive work environment for women, several recent developments indicate a change in government policy regarding women and leadership. For example, the Saudi government has announced relaxations in one of the most gender-biased laws cited in past research, the male guardianship system. Many past researchers have described the laws on male guardianship as among the most restrictive affecting women in Saudi Arabia (Fatany, 2013). While the government has eased some of the restrictions on women, the existing body of research does not investigate the impact of such changes. Shifts in policy and new initiatives to support women's leadership have the potential to bring about change. The introduction of Vision 2030 promises a relaxation of constraints on women's progression in Saudi society. Some of these barriers, such as restrictions on driving, have already been removed. However, it is yet to be seen how far these moves will weaken the glass ceiling effect in the Kingdom. This is arguably the first research looking at that effect since the removal under Vision 2030 of some of these oppressive restrictions. Therefore, the second research question that this

research aims to answer is: ***What are the possible future scenarios for women's leadership in Saudi higher education institutions in the light of Vision 2030?***

Learning about the barriers that prevent women from reaching leadership positions is only part of the solution. One way to enrich the existing body of research is to investigate longitudinally the impact of reforms and inform policymakers on what possible considerations are required for future policies in order to achieve the desired benefits (Jones, Ante, Longman and Remke, 2018; Alsubaie, 2017). The research community should look at alternative approaches, especially "constructivist and constructionist approaches to investigate the subjective experience of women and to explore how they construct their identity, as well novel studies into identity work and/or identity regulation, which will be particularly pertinent during these times of change" (Jones et al., 2018, p. 155). Therefore, the third research question that this research aims to answer is: ***What policy changes should be made in order to reduce barriers to women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions?***

3.9 Summary

Saudi Arabia is a country on the verge of major social and cultural changes, which are already evident in the increased participation of women in higher education and employment. This literature review has focused on identifying the various barriers that women leaders in higher education can face. Many scholars and academics have performed significant studies of barriers to women's career advancement and have found them often to be associated with religious, cultural, social, organisational and personal factors, which are also very prevalent in affecting women's leadership skills and aspirations.

This chapter has discussed the status of women in Saudi Arabian society and the barriers they face in securing employment in HEIs. Women's leadership in higher education was discussed from three different perspectives: the global experience of women in achieving leadership positions, the perspective of women from different Islamic countries and that of women in Saudi Arabia. Gaining insight into the experience of women in leadership

positions was significant in order to compare the position of Saudi Arabian women with that of women elsewhere. The cross-cultural perspective has offered a detailed insight into the difference in the position of women in the Western and Eastern worlds.

It is clear that there are a great many obstacles which women have to overcome in order to attain a leadership role in HE and to perform that role well. Many have to overcome barriers which evidently result from religious beliefs, societal values and cultural traditions concerning the specific roles ascribed to men and to women. In Muslim culture, women are traditionally seen as homemakers and carers with the primary responsibility to the family. They are considered the emotional bedrock of society, but as having psychological characteristics of emotional excess and instability, which in the eyes of men disqualify them from leadership roles. Saudi Arabian society (like Muslim society in general) is patriarchal in nature; therefore, the male perspective dominates the organisational agenda, in terms of society, politics and education. Within the education system, there is a hierarchical structure which places men in positions of power; allied to the general consensus that women are inferior to men, this creates pressure for women to conform to the needs and views of their male colleagues, irrespective of whether they hold a leadership position. There continues to be significant male resistance to the notion that women can perform leadership roles, to the extent that men still hold the power base with regard to the decision-making process within the education system. Female leaders have to seek permission to initiate actions and/or spend money, which does nothing to support the notion that they exercise real leadership. There is also evidence to suggest that the lack of role models and an absence of specific training and mentoring for leadership roles are problematic for women aspiring to the upper echelons of academia in Saudi Arabia.

The most significant themes appearing in this chapter's analysis of women's career advancement and the barriers they face is that of the glass ceiling effect and the many associated visible and invisible barriers restricting their access to leadership positions. Women's ability to rise to leadership positions is reflected in their social status and their ability to achieve higher education in order to gain employment in HEIs. Therefore, this chapter has discussed the status and position of women in Saudi Arabian society.

A systematic search for evidence in relation to the research questions led the literature review to focus on identifying the cultural, organisational and personal barriers to women's

accession to leadership positions in universities in Saudi Arabia. Each of these barriers was examined in relation to the glass ceiling effect. Exploration of the most prominent cultural, personal and organisational barriers also provided evidence on how women are currently enacting their roles as leaders despite the many barriers. Women in Saudi Arabia are evolving as efficient leaders in higher education and facing all the odds by developing resilience, self-efficacy and positive work relations.

Chapter 4: Data and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 presented a detailed review of the existing literature on the key aspects of this thesis and described the conceptual framework in detail. Three categories of barriers were identified, which may form or reinforce the glass ceiling by preventing women from rising to higher positions despite possessing the credentials, capabilities and willingness to do so. These were categorised as organisational, cultural and personal barriers.

This chapter details the research methodology and the methods that were used for the collection and interpretation of the data. It also explains and justifies the selection of the specific methods of data collection and interpretation adopted as appropriate to fulfil the objectives of the study and to answer the research questions, which Collis and Hussey (2009) describe as an important function of a methodology chapter. It therefore begins by restating the purpose of the research.

4.2 Research purpose

The aims of this thesis are to identify the factors that pose barriers to women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions and to recommend policy changes that could help in overcoming these barriers. This evaluative research not only establishes the links between different barriers and women's accession to leadership in Saudi HEIs but goes a step further by seeking ways in which these barriers can be managed in that context to achieve the best outcomes for Saudi government policies on women's empowerment. The key requirement here is that all policy changes must be contextualised according to Saudi socio-cultural and political conditions. It would be easy to propose sweeping policy changes, but in order for these to be practically implementable, it is essential to understand the social, political and cultural context of such an implementation. Failure to consider the context adequately might lead to the making of recommendations which, while looking good on paper, would be difficult or impossible to follow in reality.

With these aims and constraints in mind, Table 2 sets out an overview of the research design which was adopted, informed by the recommendations of Creswell (2009) and Saunders et al. (2011).

Table 2 Overview of research design

Research level	Description
Research questions	1. Which critical barriers affect women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions? 2. What are the possible future scenarios for women's leadership in Saudi higher education institutions in the light of Vision 2030? 3. What policy changes should be made in order to reduce barriers to women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions?
Strategy	Mixed (qualitative + quantitative)
Paradigm	Pragmatism
Data collection method	Questionnaire survey + Semi-structured interviews
Participants	Senior-level individuals working in Saudi higher education institutions
Type of results	Explanatory and mixed (qualitative +quantitative)

Source: Self

4.3 Research paradigm (philosophy)

This study adopts a pragmatist research philosophy. In order to meet the overall aim of recommending policies which might lead to a reduction in the barriers that women face when seeking leadership positions in Saudi HEIs, it was first essential to identify such barriers. The need for definitive answers drove the choice of positivist epistemology and objectivist ontology for this part of the research (Saunders et al., 2017). Once the self-reported barriers to women's accession to top leadership positions had been identified, the next step would be to identify what policies need to be enacted to overcome these barriers, which in turn means determining what challenges exist in managing them and what specific steps policymakers can take, within the given constraints, in order to achieve

the best outcomes. Such a determination requires consideration of factors including cultural, social, political and managerial constraints (Alomair, 2015). Given the uncertainty as to what such constraints might exist and how best to manage them, it was considered helpful to adopt an interpretivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology for this aspect of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This allowed the researcher to learn from the experts about possible constraints in designing policies specific to overcoming whatever barriers to women's accession to leadership were identified by the study.

Positivism is associated with a clearly identifiable problem and solution (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Positivism was considered useful in clearly and definitively identifying the self-reported barriers applicable to the specific context of the present research. Positivism is useful in establishing the existence of certain barriers, but in the context of this research it must be clearly identified that the barriers do affect women leaders; the mere existence of a barrier does not mean that it has a significant and meaningful impact on the observed phenomenon. It is therefore essential to determine whether each barrier has a significant role to play in reinforcing the glass ceiling for women leaders in Saudi HEIs and in what ways these barriers affect the women concerned. While significant research has been conducted on this topic and has identified such barriers more generally, the present research needed to contextualise this knowledge and to apply it to the identification of critical barriers to women's accession to leadership in context (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). For the purpose of this research the context has been set to meet the following criteria:

- Located in Saudi Arabia
- Operating in higher education institutions
- Applying to women's education.

The positivist epistemology was considered helpful in clearly and definitively establishing the relationships between the existence of various barriers and women's ability to rise to leadership positions in institutions conforming to the above criteria. It was essential to establish this relationship in order to ensure that any policy proposals contained in this thesis would be aimed at resolving specific barriers, rather than remaining vague or unfocused.

It may well be argued that governments should seek to eliminate any potential barriers, but in societies like Saudi Arabia, where many such barriers originate from long-standing

cultural beliefs, removing all of them might cause other social difficulties, so much so that the government might find it almost impossible to push through the necessary reforms. Thus, this thesis looks for an optimal and practical strategy likely to be able to deliver the desired outcomes without provoking other challenges or failing altogether. It can also be argued that while past research has identified some barriers to women's accession to leadership, there may still be some factors which have been overlooked, especially if we consider the cultural, organisational, social and political context of Saudi HEIs (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). The interpretivist epistemology is considered most suitable for identifying both these hitherto unknown factors and policy changes likely to help resolve the barriers. Above all, interpretivism is helpful in contextualising the recommendations of a study (Saunders et al., 2017). Thus, the researcher needed to take an interpretivist epistemological standpoint combined with a subjectivist ontology for this part of the research. Interpretivism is commonly used when studying a social phenomenon because it is difficult to obtain a single and clear solution (Maxwell, 2012; Glass and Cook, 2016). Interpretivism allowed the researcher to interpret the qualitative data; since each manager might have a different set of life experiences and perspectives, generalisation would not be possible. Instead, the researcher had to interpret the varied views and information provided by participants, identify the common and contrasting points raised, then formulate a picture of what the best approach might be to manage the existing barriers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This need to rely on the interpretation of views expressed by the experts on the multiple realities of the situation made interpretivism particularly suitable for this part of the research (Creswell, 2009).

Because both positivism and interpretivism were found to be required, the researcher chose to adopt a pragmatist philosophy and mixed ontology. As alluded to above, the researcher believes that the truth about women's empowerment is context-dependent; hence, in any discussion of what to manage and how to do so, it is essential to consider the context. There are several factors that determine the context of women's empowerment, such as the political, institutional, cultural and social environment (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Alomair, 2015). Women managers may be aware, to a certain extent, of which factors have impeded or might impede their accession to leadership and how such barriers operate, but this does not mean that it is easy to manage all of these factors; for example,

some of the barriers that past researchers have talked about are self-imposed and in order to manage these, policymakers must understand how these barriers are constructed by women. Pragmatists believe in identifying practical solutions to real-world problems (Saunders et al., 2017). Identifying what to manage and how to manage is one way of finding solutions. This thesis aims to identify the barriers to women's accession to leadership and then to consider practical and implementable policies to reduce them.

As stated before, one of the key issues with research into women's empowerment is the gap between its academic and practical benefits. For example, researchers sometimes identify various factors affecting the topic but provide little insight into how their findings could be practically implemented in the real world. This thesis aims not merely to contribute theoretically but also to suggest practical solutions to the problem of barriers to women's leadership. The fact that so few women occupy leadership positions means that many issues faced by women are not given due consideration in education policymaking, which generally disadvantages the whole population (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Saudi Arabia has a significantly high literacy rate for women, but unless they are given equal opportunities in every respect, the outcomes of education policy may be far from ideal. This thesis aims to tackle this issue by highlighting the need to promote women to top positions in educational institutions where they can form policies for the empowerment of women in general.

In line with the pragmatist philosophy, this research takes a mixed-method approach, which facilitates the use of a variety of tools and methods of data collection and analysis to investigate diverse views and assumptions in pursuit of the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Figure 1 illustrates the research plan adopted, with details of the dual data collection strategy in the lower part of the flow diagram.

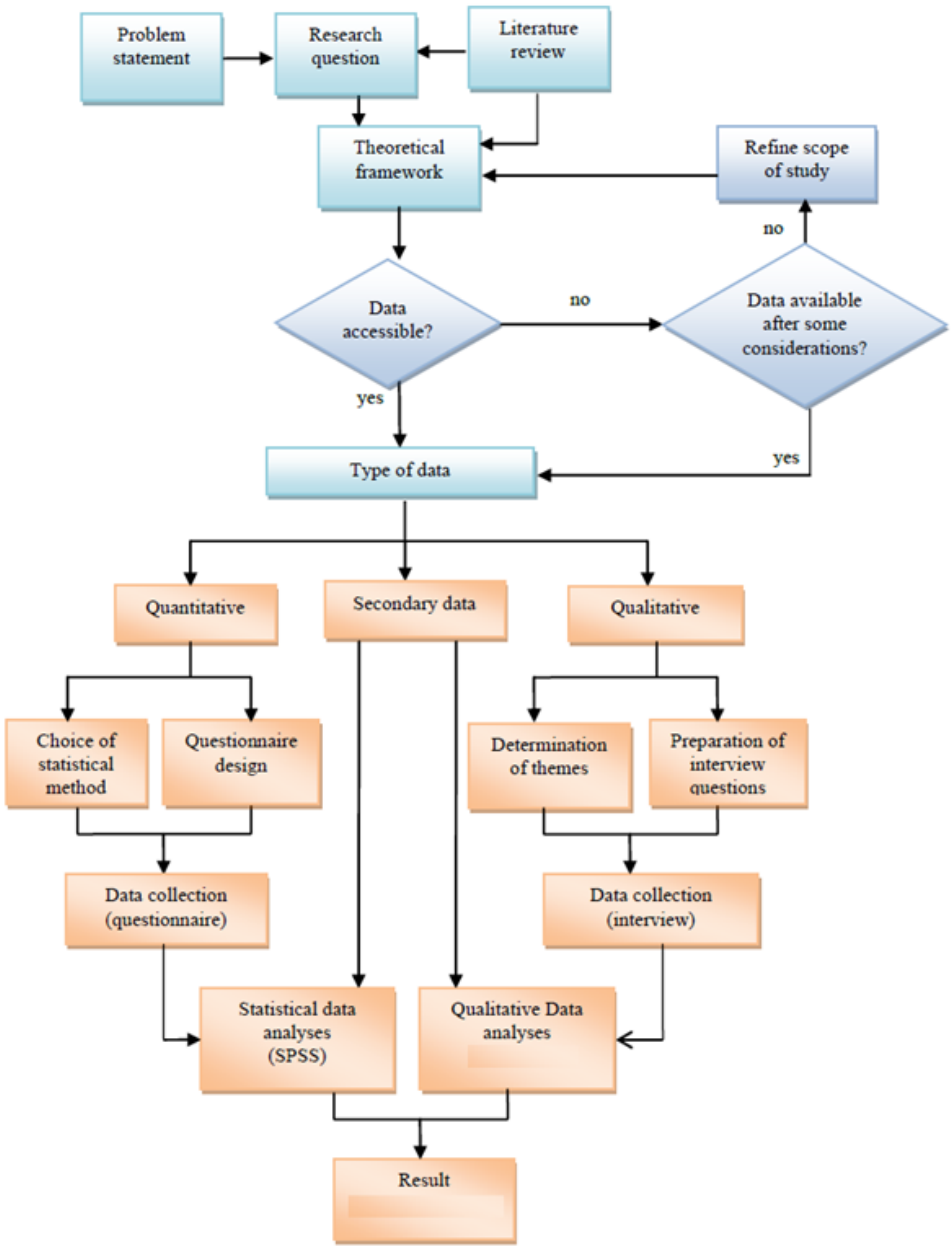

Figure 1 Research plan

Source: Self

The following section introduces the detailed methodology adopted in this research.

4.4 Research methodology

Research methods can be broadly categorised as either qualitative or quantitative, while many researchers take the third (pragmatic) approach of using mixed methods. This

methodology allows the use of any method that is appropriate to the nature of the research questions and the availability of the data.

Mixed methods were used in the present study and are considered useful in research on women's empowerment. Ponnuswamy and Manohar (2014), for example, used a combination of interviews and questionnaire surveys to investigate women's leadership in the Indian higher education system, while Sperling et al. (2014) conducted a mixed-method study of the status of female leaders in the Gulf states, collecting their data from responses to an online survey, interviews and publicly available information on family businesses and on private, public and semi-governmental organisations operating in various fields.

Some research may align well with a purely quantitative methodology because of its scientific nature, but the issue with this methodology is that it makes it difficult to consider solutions to problems. Solutions in areas such as the topic of the present research are context-bound and known only to individuals who are aware of the context. They must also be interpreted within the context, so maintaining the contextual aspect is critical. The qualitative methodology helps in preserving the context and in proposing context-specific solutions. Another benefit of qualitative methodology is that it helps in discovering new issues and solutions which may remain hidden from quantitative enquiries and which are often based on prior knowledge. This is not to say that generalisation is not useful. Indeed, it is valuable because it ensures that the problems have been studied from a broad perspective rather than a narrow focus; for example, an issue can be investigated at a national or industrial level rather than at the organisational level. These arguments indicate that a combination of qualitative and quantitative research is useful because it ensures that the findings are adequately generalisable but at the same time are specific enough to be used by policymakers. Consequently, a multilevel mixed-method design was considered most suitable for the work reported in this thesis.

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 now detail the use in the present research of quantitative and qualitative methods respectively.

4.5 Quantitative method: Questionnaire survey

4.5.1 Outline

The primary quantitative data were collected in this thesis by means of a questionnaire survey. Several other researchers have used this method of gathering data on barriers to women's leadership. For example, Abu-Zaid and Altinawi (2014) used a quantitative questionnaire survey to investigate perceived barriers to physician-scientist careers among female undergraduate medical students. Al-Manasra (2013) administered a structured questionnaire survey to mid-level female managers in Jordan to explore the effects of the glass ceiling as a barrier to their career progress. To identify the most salient challenges facing female leaders in Saudi Arabia, Al-Ahmadi (2011) used a survey questionnaire designed to measure five types of leadership challenges: structural, cultural, lack of empowerment, personal and lack of resources. Elamin and Omair (2010) used a questionnaire survey to study human resources policies that address barriers to the career advancement of Saudi women. Several other studies, such as those of Dimovski, Skerlavaj and Man (2010), Smith and Crimes (2007) and Bergman Bodil (2003), have also employed structured questionnaire surveys to gather data on barriers to women's leadership, while Alexander (2013) used a questionnaire survey to study Saudi Arabian female students' perceptions of effective female leaders.

The literature review has produced a list of factors that could prove to be barriers to women's accession to leadership positions in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the quantitative arm of this thesis is to determine, at a general level, which of these factors are relevant in the context of Saudi women's accession to leadership in Saudi HEIs. One advantage of collecting questionnaire data is that it was possible to subject it to quantitative analysis and thus to facilitate the generalisation of the findings. Therefore, a large number of responses were required and it was considered most effective to design a structured survey comprising closed questions. The survey was administered to senior and mid-level female professionals in Saudi HEIs with the specific aim of identifying barriers which might affect women's progression to leadership positions in their respective institutions.

In order to ensure that the respondents gave true and accurate responses, the following steps were taken:

- A pilot survey was conducted with 10 individuals who had similar profiles to those of the target respondents. They were asked to provide feedback on the questions: for example, whether the language was unclear or ambiguous and whether they felt reluctant to answer any specific questions. They were also invited to comment on other aspects such as the length of each question and of the whole questionnaire. Brief written notes were provided to explain what information was being sought through specific questions and respondents were asked to say whether they thought that the wording of any question could have been interpreted differently from the intention suggested by these notes. The questionnaire was modified in response to the feedback received.
- Respondents were made aware that they would be responding anonymously and that no one, including the researcher, would be able to know their identity. They were also informed of the ethical guidelines regarding voluntary participation, their freedom to withdraw at any stage, their right to privacy etc. Being able to report anonymously was expected to ensure that respondents provided true and accurate responses to the questions.
- Respondents were not asked direct questions about their personal experience but about whether they perceived certain factors as barriers. In other words, they were asked to reflect not only on their own perceptions but also on their general views of the barriers to women's leadership in the Saudi higher education system. Thus, when answering, they were not making direct reference to themselves or their organisations but rather to women's leadership in Saudi higher education in general.
- The questionnaires were anonymous, self-reported and self-administered, which means that women could participate without fear of embarrassment or repercussions. Respondents were asked to rate organisational, cultural and personal barriers to achieving leadership positions and some may have had reservations about openly criticising organisational policies or Saudi culture, potentially leading them to give false information or at least to moderate their responses. Collecting the data anonymously may have given them the confidence to respond candidly.

4.5.2 Construction of questionnaire

This research followed the seven-step questionnaire development framework proposed by Churchill and Iacobucci (2002). The first step involves specifying the information sought. For this research the information sought was identified from a review of existing literature. Extensive research has been conducted on barriers to women's leadership around the world, including in Saudi Arabia. This extensive literature was used to identify the range of factors that could influence women's leadership in Saudi HEIs. This knowledge led to the identification of constructs and questions within each construct, which is the second step of the questionnaire development framework. In order to ensure that only the relevant constructs and questions were included in th3 survey, the researcher focused on reading recent and relevant literature, including papers based on systematic literature reviews (see, for example, Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

The third step in the questionnaire development framework was to formulate the responses. In order to minimise confusion and effort for the respondents, the set of available responses to all items were based on a five-point Likert-type scale. This was also useful because precoded responses are easy to compile and analyse. The fourth step focused on selecting the right wording for each question. While the researcher may know exactly what information she is seeing from each question, if the questions are not worded carefully the respondents may misinterpret and provide wrong responses. In order to ensure that the questions were understood similarly by respondents, pilot interviews were conducted. Pilot survey participants were asked to provide their comments if they had difficulty in understanding any question in the pilot survey.

The fifth step involved determining the sequence of the questions. It was decided that a logical sequence with questions related to each construct placed together would be most useful, as it would minimise confusion and effort for the respondents. However, in order to ensure that they read each question carefully, the language was altered randomly from affirmative to dissenting. Step six involved determining the layout and physical characteristics of the questionnaire. In order to ensure that people did not lose focus due to boredom whilst completing the survey, an attractive design was adopted. Each construct was allocated one page, so that moving from one page to another would signal that one

stage of the survey had been completed (Fisher, 2007). The researcher also ensured that the questionnaire was not unnecessarily long.

The final step of the questionnaire development framework was validation, achieved by means of the pilot survey mentioned above.

4.5.3 Structure of the questionnaire

The survey was divided into six main parts. The first elicited general information about the respondents and their organisations, then the five scales of women's leadership were measured by a total of 51 items, distributed as follows: 14 items on organisational barriers, 16 on cultural barriers, seven on family-work balance, 10 on personal barriers and four on women in leadership roles in Islam.

The knowledge gained through the comprehensive and extensive literature review helped in constructing and preparing appropriate items for the questionnaire.

4.5.4 Sampling

This study adopted a strategy of purposive sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling, where the sample population is selected according to predetermined criteria (Babbie, 2010). It was essential to collect data from individuals having sufficient knowledge of all kinds of barriers that women face in rising to leadership positions in Saudi HEIs. After careful consideration, it was decided to sample females who were working or had worked in senior positions in such institutions. In order to increase its size, the sample was expanded to include all such individuals from all Saudi HEIs.

4.5.5 Administering the questionnaire

Human resources managers of public and private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia were contacted by email to seek their permission to conduct the survey among senior-level female employees in their organisations. The email provided full details of the project, including the ethical guidelines issued by the University of Lincoln. Respondents

had the choice of completing the survey either online or on paper. The first option was available through an online link, while individuals who opted for the second were provided with hard copies, along with a prepaid envelope to submit the completed questionnaire by post. For online participants, a link was sent to all HR managers who had given their approval for the survey to be conducted in their organisations. Each HR manager was requested to distribute the survey to all qualifying employees within their institution. The email contained information on the project and details of the ethical guidelines, including the rights of participants. Each HR manager also received 20 hard copies to forward to those prospective respondents who were not willing to complete the survey online.

The online survey was kept open for two months in order to maximise the response rate. HR managers were asked to forward two reminders to potential online respondents, one month apart, requesting them to complete the survey if they had not yet done so.

A total of 579 individuals were invited to participate in the survey and 253 responded. This represents a 55% response rate.

4.5.6 Quantitative data analysis

Once all the completed questionnaires had been returned, copies of all of the online responses were downloaded onto an Excel spreadsheet and data from all hard copies received were entered manually. After all of the responses had been transferred onto the spreadsheet, the data were exported to the SPSS software for analysis.

Biased samples can result in biased results (Saunders et al. 2017). In order to address this issue, the sample adequacy was first checked using frequency analysis and bar charts. This was essential to determine whether the sample was an adequate representation of the target population.

Questionnaire data were then subjected to a number of tests, as detailed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3). The KMO and Bartlett's tests were conducted to determine whether the correlation matrix was an identity matrix, and exploratory factor analysis was performed to measure the internal reliability of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the overall nature of the responses. Finally, within-group comparison of means was

carried out to test whether the characteristics of the respondents could be used to explain their perceptions of the barriers affecting women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs.

4.5.7 Reliability and validity

In quantitative research, reliability refers to three elements: "(1) the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same; (2) the stability of a measurement over time; and (3) the similarity of measurements within a given time period" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). The survey instrument used in the present research was designed to measure barriers to women's leadership in the specific context of the current situation of Saudi higher education. However, Saudi Arabia as a whole is undergoing a significant transformation of its cultural, social, economic and political environment, especially in respect of women's empowerment. The research instrument may therefore need revising for use in any similar research conducted in future, as any of the existing barriers may be altered or even completely eliminated as a result of such changes. However, the results reported in Chapter 5 show that the questionnaire could be considered reliable in the present context.

The validity of a quantitative research instrument refers to whether it truly measures that which it was intended to measure. To determine this, the questionnaire was pilot tested among three experts and a pilot survey was conducted on individuals who matched the profile of the target population, as explained in Section 4.5.1.

4.6 Qualitative research

One of the key contributions of this thesis is that it provides contextualised recommendations for decision-makers at organisational and policy level on what policies might be adopted to overcome the barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions. A disadvantage of using the recommendations from studies conducted elsewhere is the difference in context. Saudi Arabia has a very distinct culture, shaped by its tribal origins, as well as reliance on Shariah principles to guide policymaking at all levels. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to adopt recommendations made in other

countries. For example, the gender segregation that is imposed in Saudi Arabia makes it a context completely distinct from most other countries, where such segregation does not operate.

This study also takes into consideration the changes that are being introduced in Saudi Arabia under the government's Vision 2030 plan. As these have only recently started to take effect, any impact on the barriers under investigation is most likely to have been perceptual and not factual. Qualitative methods are quite useful in learning about perceptual data.

Finally, no existing studies have examined policy-based solutions to the problem in the Saudi Arabian context, making it difficult to design a structured questionnaire which would identify appropriate solutions. This means that finding policy-level solutions is a completely new aspect of this research; hence, an exploratory approach was considered useful in this regard. Such policy recommendations are based entirely on the life experiences and knowledge of the participants, not on objective facts, at least in the Saudi context. Therefore, qualitative methods of eliciting participants' perceptions and views were considered most suitable for this second arm of the research.

4.6.1 Usefulness of interviews

Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of allowing researchers to probe and gain insight into issues to which they have not previously been exposed, collecting sufficient meaningful data despite a lack of deep knowledge of the subject. In the present study, the questionnaire survey was expected to provide adequate data for the identification of the critical barriers, but supplementary interviews with experts were considered useful to identify ways in which these barriers might be removed. Merely learning which factors pose barriers to women's accession to leadership in Saudi HEIs would not in itself provide any kind of solution to the problem being investigated, which is one of the key objectives of any evaluation study. It is widely accepted that women are underrepresented at top levels in Saudi HEIs. However, little effort has been invested in identifying possible solutions to this problem, which cannot be done externally but must involve interaction with individuals who have faced such barriers and possess sufficient expertise both to identify them and to judge what policy changes are likely to help in overcoming them. The

impact of policy changes is only perceptual, and there is no concrete evidence to suggest that particular policy initiatives will lead to desired changes in the status quo. Such perceptual impacts are best investigated using qualitative methods.

Several authors have reported the use of interviews in their studies of barriers to female leadership. For example, Arini et al. (2011) investigated the impact of the formal and informal experiences of female university leaders on their professional development and advancement. As their method of narrative inquiry among 26 female leaders across eight universities in New Zealand, they adopted the critical incident technique, "a form of interview research in which participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim" (Arini et al., 2011, p. 48). Pyke (2013) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 24 culturally diverse female lecturers at an Australian university to explore factors that influenced women to withdraw from seeking promotion to a higher academic ranking.

In a similar context to that of the present research, Taleb (2010) used in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven female leaders at a college in a case study designed to investigate their perceptions of female leadership effectiveness in Saudi HEIs and of their own leadership styles. Taleb contends that it is beneficial to interview in depth participants such as senior managers and leaders who differ in background and in their views on leadership. Longman et al. (2018) used interviews in a study of how organisational culture shapes women's leadership experiences. Gonaim and Peters (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with former and current department chairs and faculty members in Saudi HEIs to identify leadership practices, characteristics and behaviours contributing to the effectiveness of female chairs of academic departments and the challenges that they face. Hodges (2017) also used semi-structured interviews to investigate the perceptions and experiences of professional women in Saudi Arabia and the challenges facing them.

Interviews are generally the most appropriate data collection tool when the sample is quite small and when it comprises experts (Gonaim and Peters, 2017; Arar, 2016; Pyke, 2013; Taleb, 2010). The qualitative data analysed in this thesis were collected from a small number of female senior managers working in Saudi HEIs. Such individuals can only be recruited from all-female universities, because females are not allowed to teach male students in Saudi Arabia. There are very few such universities in the country and

consequently few senior managers working in them. The sample size was further limited by many such managers being unavailable for an interview. Thus, this arm of the research relied on a small sample, making interviews the most suitable strategy for collecting useful data from them.

The key benefits of using interviews for this part of the research are as follows:

- A total of only 15 managers from four universities were available to participate, and interviews allowed the collection of quite useful and insightful data from this very small set of respondents.
- Since the questionnaire was based on existing literature, the quantitative survey was unable to investigate any new ideas or barriers that had not been considered in past research. The one-to-one engagement with experts afforded by semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to elicit whatever responses were required to explore new themes in constructive discussion. This flexibility extended to the opportunity to explore some aspects of the topic of which the researcher was unaware before the interviews began.
- The interviewees were all senior professionals. One-to-one interviews were preferred over other exploratory methods such as focus groups, because arranging for a number of such busy individuals to attend a session at the same time would have been very difficult. Furthermore, some might have been reluctant to express their views openly in front of colleagues; for example, they might have feared repercussions if they had criticised the official policies of their respective organisations. Individual interviews allowed data to be collected discreetly and confidentially from each participant at a time and place convenient to her.

For this thesis, it was essential to use the technique of active interviewing, which goes beyond a simple question-and-answer session to an active discussion between interviewer and interviewee so that new and rich information can be actively assembled or created. In this method, the interviewer attempts to activate the interviewee's "stock of knowledge to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 123). However, this is not an ethnographic study, where the researcher completely immerses himself/herself in the lives of the participants. It was important to remain within the scope of this study and to let the respondents make their

own judgements, rather than the researcher looking to make her judgements on what she had observed and understood. In order to minimise researcher bias, the analysis of qualitative data in Chapter 6 features a number of direct quotes from responses to each question, thus validating the researcher's interpretation of the data (Wengraf, 2001).

Most of the respondents disagreed with the interviews being audio-recorded or were apprehensive about this possibility. It was clear that recording their voices might make interviewees sufficiently uncomfortable to cause them to moderate their responses. Instead, the researcher, therefore, took shorthand notes during the interviews and prepared complete transcripts from these immediately after each interview.

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) describe the interview process as comprising four stages: preparing the interview questions, then collecting, analysing and interpreting the data. The following subsections deal successively with these stages and with the sampling technique employed.

4.6.2 Question formulation

The interview questions were designed to be open in nature in order to elicit a relatively holistic account of participants' experiences. Their content was based on the knowledge acquired from the literature review and on the findings of the questionnaire survey. All interviews began with a short discussion of the study topic and the overall findings of the questionnaire survey. There followed a detailed discussion to explore interviewees' perceptions of the various kinds of barriers to women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs and of how Vision 2030 had affected these barriers and changed the overall growth prospects for women in higher education.

One question was prepared for each of the variables and the interviewees were encouraged to provide detailed information, with the choice of responding in either English or Arabic. Forcing them to speak in a particular language could have affected their responses; for example, if an interviewee could not find a suitable word in a particular language, she might have decided to omit the whole sentence from her response. It was essential that participants did not feel restricted in expressing themselves due to language issues.

Most interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Since interviewees were advised prior to the interviews that they might last from 60 to 90 minutes, no problems of timing arose during the interviews. Failure to estimate their duration correctly could have led the interviewer to hurry through the questions, potentially impairing the quality of data collected, so it was deliberately overestimated at the time of consent to prepare the respondents mentally and logistically for more time to be taken than was actually required.

Respondents were informed that data collection and analysis would adhere strictly to the ethical guidelines set by the University and published on its website, to which an online link was provided at the time of obtaining consent for the interviews. Respondents were contacted through their employing organisations, and their HR managers were given detailed information on the project, its aim and objectives, and the nature of the information sought, as well as a sample of the kind of questions to be asked in the interviews. This was done to alleviate any concerns that the authorities could have had about the kind of information that was being collected and how it would be used.

The researcher provided any information required and requested by the HR managers, who gave written consent for the researcher to contact the prospective participants directly. Contact was then made via the email addresses provided by the HR managers. Addressees were asked to record their consent by replying to the email. It was clarified that relevant permission had already been obtained from the HR division, that no one was under any obligation to participate in the research, as participation was completely voluntary, and that anyone having consented to participate would have the option of opting out at any time during the project, up to the data analysis stage, without any conditions.

4.6.3 Sampling

Because conducting studies in Saudi Arabia is hindered by a number of methodological challenges, such as organisations not allowing individuals to collect data from their employees (Omair, 2008), obtaining a representative sample of women through conventional sampling is difficult, thus necessitating the use of a convenience sample (Berg, 2004). The purpose of this sampling technique is not to “establish a random or representative sample but rather to identify those people who have information about the process” (Hornby and Symon, 1994, p. 169). The sample for the present study was

accordingly constructed using professional and informal networks, which is an approach often employed as a means of gaining access (Gummesson, 2000). The technique used was snowball sampling, whereby individuals who agreed to participate then helped in recruiting other potential respondents (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

Data were collected from female respondents only. There were several reasons for excluding males from participating in the interviews:

- Gender segregation, mentioned above, would have made it difficult to recruit male participants for a one-to-one discussion.
- Male respondents might not have been able to reflect accurately and reliably on the barriers that women face; unlike women, for example, they might not have perceived certain personal factors such as family responsibilities as constituting barriers. Thus, including men in the survey might have introduced noise and ambiguity into the data.
- Since the purpose of the interviews was to explore factors that might create barriers for women leaders, it was essential that the interviewees were individuals who had themselves experienced these barriers, which by definition excluded men from the target population for interviews.

4.6.4 Data collection

Each interview began with the researcher formally introducing herself and initiating a brief discussion of the objectives of the research, then the interviewee was asked for her opinions on the barriers affecting women's leadership in Saudi HEIs and how, if at all, the introduction of Vision 2030 had affected these barriers. Respondents were also asked to share their perceptions of possible future scenarios, considering the recent developments in Saudi Arabia. During each interview, the researcher asked questions and listened patiently for the interviewee to provide information, noting her responses in shorthand to be transcribed later, as explained above. When more information was required or when clarification was needed, appropriate follow-up questions were asked (Cassell, 2015).

4.6.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed manually using software applications such as NVivo and Atlas. Manual coding was considered more suitable for the present research due to the purely exploratory nature of the qualitative arm of the study. The researcher was not much interested in the frequencies and relationships between variables, and there was insufficient data available for meaningful software analysis. Only 15 interviews were conducted and the purpose was not to compare the views expressed by the different interviewees but rather to understand from their unique perspective how current developments might drive or lead to changes in the barriers affecting Saudi women's rise to leadership in higher education. The purpose of the analysis was, therefore, to compile a coherent overarching narrative by drawing together the views of all interviewees, rather than to compare their views in order to identify a dominant narrative among them.

This analysis began with a simple reading of the transcripts to gain a good understanding of what information might be contained within the data. This was followed by identification of the codes and categories by which the data might be categorised. Once all of the data had been encoded in this way, the next stage was focused on coding, where the most significant categories and any related ones were selected and listed under central themes. This does not mean that other data were ignored; rather, it helped the researcher to focus on the information most relevant to the study, with related codes being organised under themes to facilitate the analysis. Next, subthemes were identified, and all themes and subthemes were reviewed to decide whether some should be merged or further subdivided to arrive at the final list of themes and subthemes. These were then labelled with suitable names and defined, followed by the writing up of the findings.

4.6.6 Data interpretation

The interpretation of data is one of the most significant aspects of qualitative research (Clark and Creswell, 2011). Failure to interpret qualitative data correctly can lead to inaccurate findings. It was therefore essential for the interviewer to seek as much clarification as needed to ensure that she fully understood the respondents' opinions and recorded them as they intended. To this end, the researcher used a probing technique,

asking respondents to provide real-life practical examples to illustrate any general responses. This not only allowed the collection of meaningful data but also ensured that responses were verifiable, by asking interviewees to self-verify their data by means of these concrete examples of their personal experience. In certain cases, people's beliefs can differ from their own experience, even though our experiences are facts in themselves; for example, many women may perceive the overall environment to be restrictive for women in general, while not having experienced such restrictions in their own homes or workplaces. More generally, a particular person's beliefs may be determined by a wider perception of the environment, shaped in part by the experiences that other individuals within their social circle have shared with them, although these may differ from that person's own experiences. Usó-Doménech and Nescolarde-Selva (2015) argue that the problem here is that beliefs may be purely perceptual and not necessarily based on fact. It is thus more useful to trust our experiences than our beliefs. Using self-reflection through practical examples helps to ensure that people provide information based on facts and not on mere beliefs. Thus, the present researcher sought evidence to support respondents' views, both during the interviews and in the analysis of qualitative data.

4.6.7 Limitations of interviews

The interviews were subject to several limitations which may have affected the quality of the data and must therefore be kept in mind. First, although participants were assured that their data would remain anonymous and that their identities would be kept completely confidential, some may not have completely trusted this assertion and may thus have moderated their responses for fear of repercussions (Hartas, 2010). In order to overcome this possibility, the interview questions were framed in terms of the situation in Saudi Arabia in general, rather being specific to a respondent's own family or employer.

Inadequately conducted interviews can produce poor quality data (Hartas, 2010). The researcher therefore kept all possibilities in mind when planning the interviews. Since respondents' lives could be unpredictable for reasons such as last-minute commitments, they were asked to suggest three possible times for their interviews, so that if a woman was unexpectedly unable to attend on the first occasion, it would be easy to rearrange her appointment without putting undue pressure on the interviewee (Wengraf, 2001).

Participants were also given the freedom to choose the locations of their interviews to minimise any inconvenience to them (Hartas, 2010).

Interpretation bias is a key issue in qualitative data analysis (Hartas, 2010). The present researcher is herself a Saudi woman with experience of working in higher education, making it possible that her own experience and beliefs may have led to some interpretation bias (Wengraf, 2001). In order to minimise this possibility, the researcher tried her best to be as objective as possible in analysing the interviews, using direct evidence from the interviews and asking respondents to provide examples (Hartas, 2010), as explained in Section 4.6.6.

In some cases, interviewees may modify their responses to bring them closer to what they believe (rightly or wrongly) the researcher would see as an acceptable response, even though they themselves may not completely agree with this (Hartas, 2010). For example, knowing that the research being conducted concerned the barriers that Saudi women face in rising to top positions in HEIs and how Vision 2030 has affected these barriers, it may be that some interviewees would tend towards responses recognising that such barriers do exist and that the government's development plan is likely to reduce their effect, despite not believing either of these assertions to be completely true. This was another reason for using the probing technique discussed in Section 4.6.6, asking respondents to give personal examples to confirm that they actually believed in what they were saying (Wengraf, 2001).

4.7 Ethical approval

Since the present study involves human participants, details of the data collection process were given to the University of Lincoln's Ethical Committee, which duly gave its approval. Data were collected anonymously and full details of the project were provided to the respondents. Informed consent was obtained prior to the collection of data. Respondents were informed of their right to voluntary participation and to withdraw from the research at any stage.

No external party had access to the data, which were anonymised so that the identity of all participants was completely confidential.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has given details of the methodology adopted for this study. An initial account of its purpose was followed by a discussion of research philosophy, considering the distinctive features of standpoint and applicability of the four main philosophical paradigms. This discussion concluded by explaining the adoption of a pragmatic philosophy for the present research because it allows the use of multiple methods and can be very useful in investigating a research problem from various perspectives.

The philosophical discussion also considered the epistemological and ontological choices to be made concerning the two stages of the research study, depending on the purpose of each stage. The first of these was to identify, consolidate and generalise all of the factors impeding women's accession to leadership in Saudi higher education institutions, for which a positivist epistemology and objectivist ontology were considered appropriate. The second stage was to identify ways in which these barriers could be managed through changes in policy and how they might be affected by the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030. Since this plan had no real observable impacts, the study would be able to gather data only on participants' perceptions of it, making the interpretivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology ideal for this arm of the research

The next aspect of methodology to be discussed was the use of mixed methods to gather data. Research into barriers to women's leadership has hitherto relied mainly on quantitative methods, because they carry the advantages of generalisability, validity, reliability etc. However, such methods are able only to validate existing knowledge and do not contribute significantly to new knowledge. In order to meet its second aim of identifying policies and strategies to overcome barriers to women's leadership, it was concluded that the present study should complement quantitative with qualitative methodology, adopting a multilevel mixed-method approach.

There followed detailed explanations of the design and delivery of the two main data-gathering tools: a quantitative questionnaire survey and a round of qualitative one-to-one interviews. The discussion covered the justification for choosing these methods and consideration of their limitations and strengths. There were also separate accounts of the

sampling strategy and data analysis approach for each of the methods, and the chapter concluded with a brief mention of ethical considerations.

The next chapter presents an analysis of the quantitative survey data.

Chapter 5 Quantitative Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methods employed to achieve the research objectives. This chapter details the statistical analysis applied to the quantitative data to answer the research questions. It is structured as follows:

1. Details of basic personal characteristics of the study's participants using plots, frequency distributions and means.
2. Results of factor analysis, showing that the variables were correlated and identifying those items in the dataset to be extracted and retained for further analysis.
3. Results of reliability analysis to assess the internal consistency of the items.
4. Finally, having established the normality of distribution of the data, analysis of results for each of the five dependent variables, comparing the responses of the different demographic groups of women, using the t-test and one-way ANOVA.

5.2 Personal information

The data were collected from 253 female leaders of seven different nationalities. Figure 2 shows that over 90% of the women were from Saudi Arabia, while only around 3% were from each of Egypt and Jordan, and fewer than 2% from each of the other four nations represented. As Figure 3 reveals, more than three-quarters of respondents were under 45 years of age, with almost 60% between 31 and 45 years old. Most participants were married (Figure 4), and only 20% were childless (Figure 5), while half had more than two children. Figure 6 shows that almost half of the women were educated to doctorate level and that most of the rest held a master's degree.

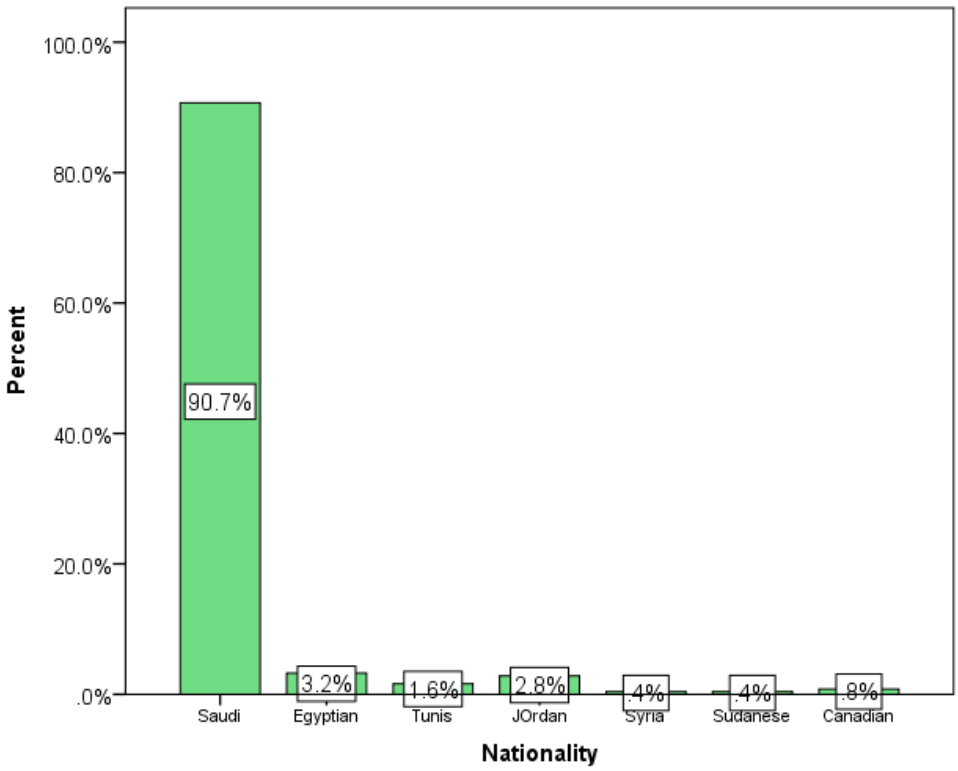

Figure 2 Distribution of respondents by nationality

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by nationality

Nationality	Number	Percent
Saudi	229	90.70%
Egyptian	8	3.20%
Jordanian	7	2.80%
Tunisian	4	1.60%
Syrian	1	0.40%
Sudanese	1	0.40%
Canadian	2	0.80%

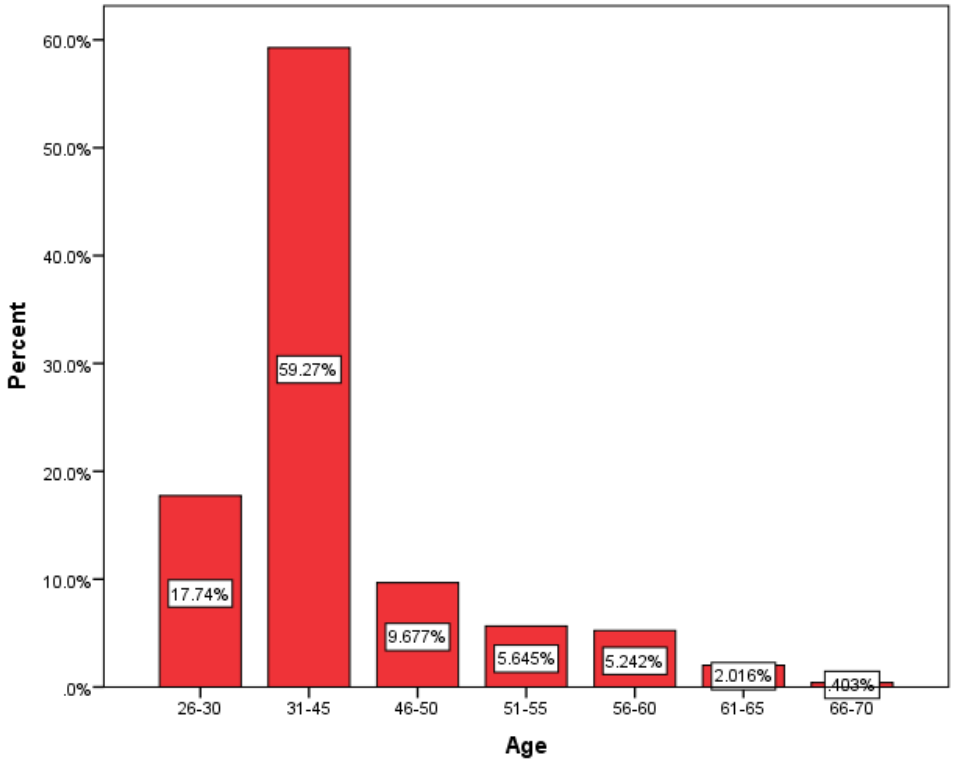

Figure 3 Distribution of respondents by age

Table 4 Distribution of respondents by age

Age group	Number	Per cent
26-30	45	17.74%
31-45	150	59.27%
46-50	24	9.68%
51-55	14	5.65%
56-60	13	5.24%
61-65	5	2.02%
66-70	1	0.40%

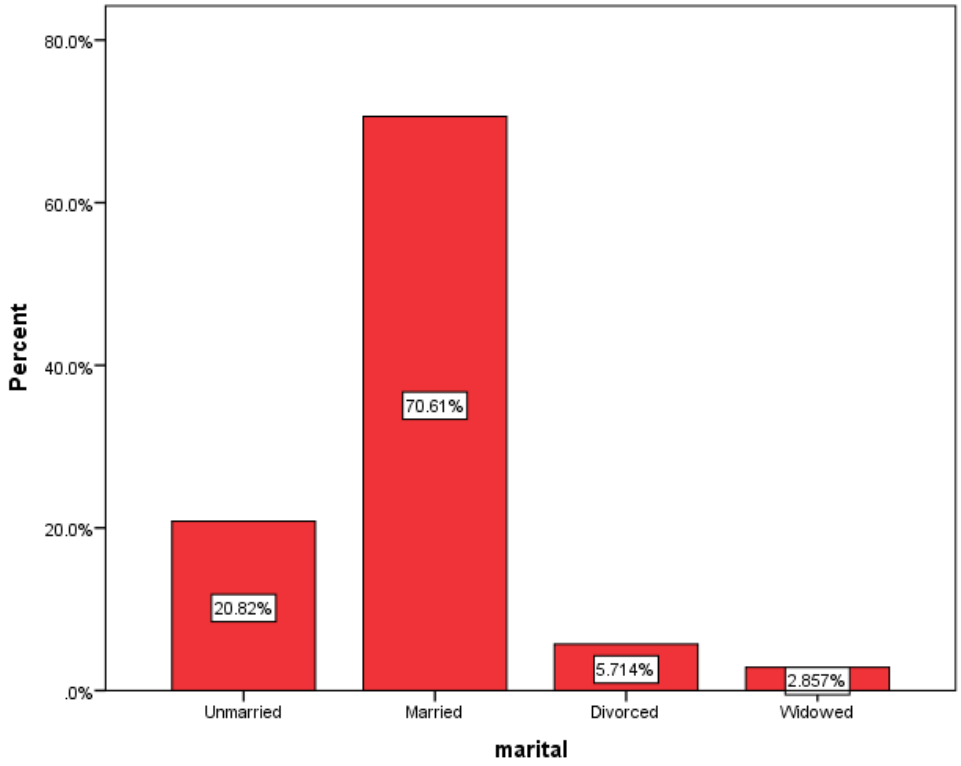

Figure 4 Distribution by marital status

Table 5 Distribution by marital status

Marital status	Number	Per cent
Unmarried	53	20.82%
Married	179	70.61%
Divorced	14	5.71%
Widowed	7	2.86%

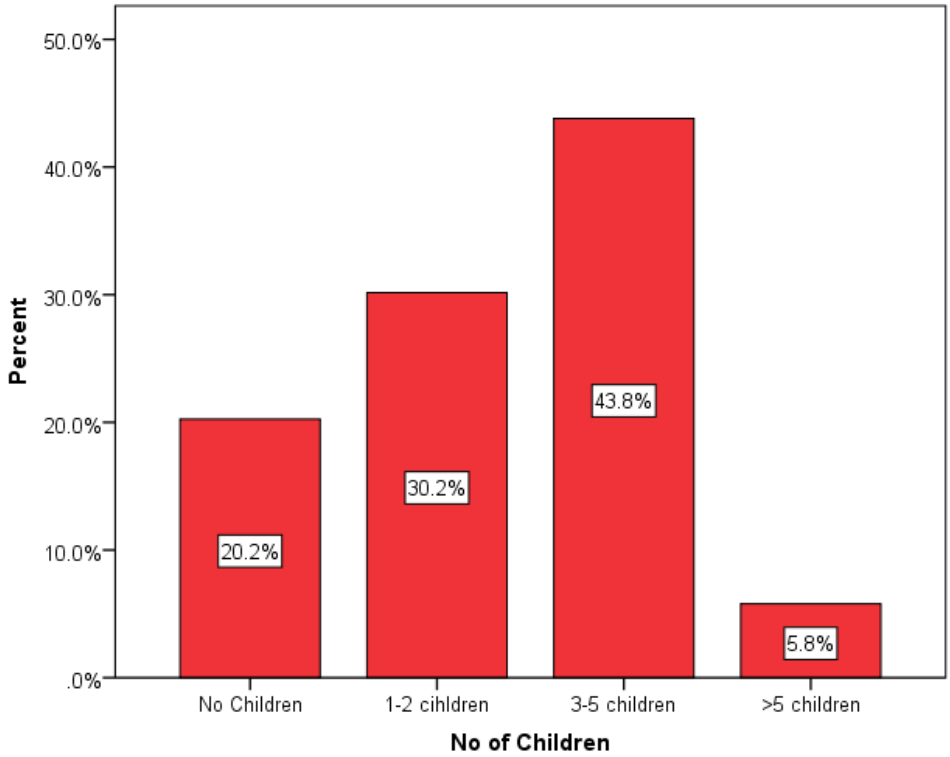

Figure 5 Distribution of respondents by number of children

Table 6 Distribution of respondents by number of children

No. of children	Number	Percent
None	51	20.20%
1-2	76	30.20%
3-4	111	43.80%
>5	15	5.80%

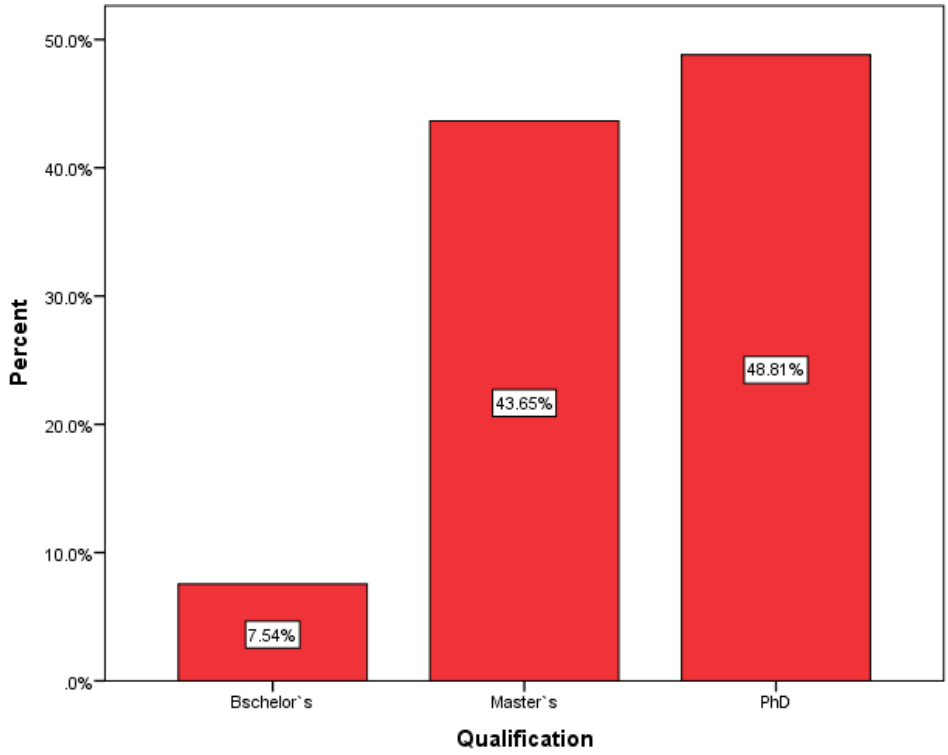

Figure 6 Distribution of respondents by qualification

Table 7 Distribution of respondents by qualification

Qualification	Number	Percent
Bachelor's	19	7.54%
Master's	111	43.65%
PhD	123	48.81%

5.3 Exploratory factor analysis

The goal of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was to examine whether the scales of women's leadership were loaded on a single factor or multiple dimensions. The five scales were measured by 51 items in the questionnaire, distributed as follows: organisational challenges were measured by 14 items (B1-B14), cultural challenges by 16 items (C1-C16), family-work balance by seven items (E1-E7), personal barriers by 10 items (F1-F10) and women in leadership roles by four items (G1-G4).

The result of EFA was a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.81, indicating sample adequacy for EFA (Table 8, iteration 1). Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to determine whether the correlation matrix was an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables were unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. This helps in assessing whether the redundancy between the variables would allow summarising of variables within fewer factors. The null hypothesis for this test is that the variables are orthogonal, i.e. not correlated. An identity matrix is a correlation matrix where all diagonal values are one and all remaining values are zero; in other words, each variable is correlated only to itself and not to any other variable. This test is often conducted before any data reduction test, such as factor analysis or principal component analysis.

Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant ($p<0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and hence that there were correlations between the variables. The eigenvalues represent the variance, which needs to be higher than one, associated with each extracted factor. Table 8 indicates that the dataset contained 10 extracted factors (eigenvalues >1.00), cumulatively accounting for 66.105% of the total variance. To extract factors orthogonally with corresponding distinct items, the EFA was repeated using a varimax rotation approach, again showing 66.105% of the total variance. Pallant (2007) recommends that weak items with low loading (values <0.3) be excluded from the analysis to improve or refine the scales. All such items were accordingly excluded and any factor with only one item was isolated. Any items constructing uninformative factors were also candidates for exclusion from the analysis. The results were that each of C6, B10 and F1 were allocated into three isolated factors and that items C2 and F8 created one factor (Table 9). These five items were therefore excluded from the analysis.

On the second iteration (Table 8), the KMO value was 0.81 and the result of Bartlett's test was statistically highly significant ($p<0.001$). The eigenvalues presented in Table 9 indicate that the dataset contained seven extracted factors (eigenvalues >1.00), accounting for 62.893% of the total variance. Using the varimax rotation approach, item F4 constructed an isolated factor and so was dropped from the analysis.

Table 8 KMO and Bartlett's test

		Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3	Iteration 4
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.815	.821	.821	.824
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-squared	6429.58	5942.27	.5847.57	5290.06
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	Items removed	C6, B10, F1, C2, F8	F4	B2, C7	

When EFA was run again (Table 8, iteration 3), the KMO value was 0.821 and Bartlett's test was again statistically highly significant (p<001). The eigenvalues listed in Table 9 indicate that the dataset again contained seven extracted factors, explaining 63.774% of the total variance. Using the rotation approach, items B2 and C7 were excluded for belonging to two isolated factors. On iteration 4, the KMO value rose slightly to 0.824 and Bartlett's test was once more highly significant (Table 8).

Table 9 Extracted eigenvalues and percentage of total variance explained, for four iterations

Com-ponent	Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Eigen-values	% of variance	Cumulative %	Eigen-values	% of variance	Cumulative %
Iteration 1						
1	8.996	20.922	20.922	5.602	13.027	13.027
2	5.298	12.322	33.244	5.368	12.484	25.512
3	3.515	8.174	41.418	3.766	8.758	34.270
4	2.719	6.324	47.742	3.613	8.403	42.673
5	1.908	4.437	52.179	2.675	6.220	48.892
6	1.534	3.568	55.747	1.783	4.147	53.039
7	1.240	2.883	58.630	1.460	3.396	56.435
8	1.148	2.671	61.300	1.432	3.330	59.764
9	1.061	2.468	63.768	1.411	3.283	63.047
10	1.005	2.336	66.105	1.315	3.058	66.105
Iteration 2						
1	8.614	22.668	22.668	5.565	14.646	14.646
2	4.923	12.956	35.624	5.519	14.524	29.169
3	3.488	9.179	44.803	3.655	9.619	38.789
4	2.558	6.733	51.536	3.527	9.281	48.070
5	1.827	4.808	56.344	2.571	6.766	54.836
6	1.433	3.772	60.116	1.555	4.091	58.927
7	1.055	2.777	62.893	1.507	3.966	62.893

Com-ponent	Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Eigen-values	% of variance	Cumulative %	Eigen-values	% of variance	Cumulative %
Iteration 3						
1	8.566	23.152	23.152	5.633	15.224	15.224
2	4.824	13.037	36.189	5.396	14.583	29.807
3	3.484	9.417	45.607	3.680	9.945	39.752
4	2.501	6.760	52.367	3.502	9.464	49.216
5	1.811	4.894	57.261	2.582	6.979	56.195
6	1.392	3.763	61.023	1.547	4.182	60.377
7	1.018	2.750	63.774	1.257	3.397	63.774
Iteration 4						
1	7.965	22.758	22.758	5.410	15.457	15.457
2	4.688	13.395	36.153	5.166	14.761	30.217
3	3.342	9.548	45.701	3.622	10.349	40.567
4	2.480	7.086	52.788	3.532	10.092	50.659
5	1.800	5.141	57.929	2.531	7.232	57.891
6	1.257	3.592	61.522	1.271	3.631	61.522

The eigenvalues presented in Table 9 indicate that the dataset now contained six extracted factors accounting for 61.522% of the total variance. Using the rotation approach, the items were assigned to seven extracted factors with distinct factor loadings, so further examination was needed. Figure 7 is a screen plot of eigenvalues of the extracted factors, a technique useful in deciding how many factors to retain (Pallant, 2007). Inspection of the screen plot reveals a clear break after the first component (factor) and no further clear changes after factor 5, so only these first five were retained.

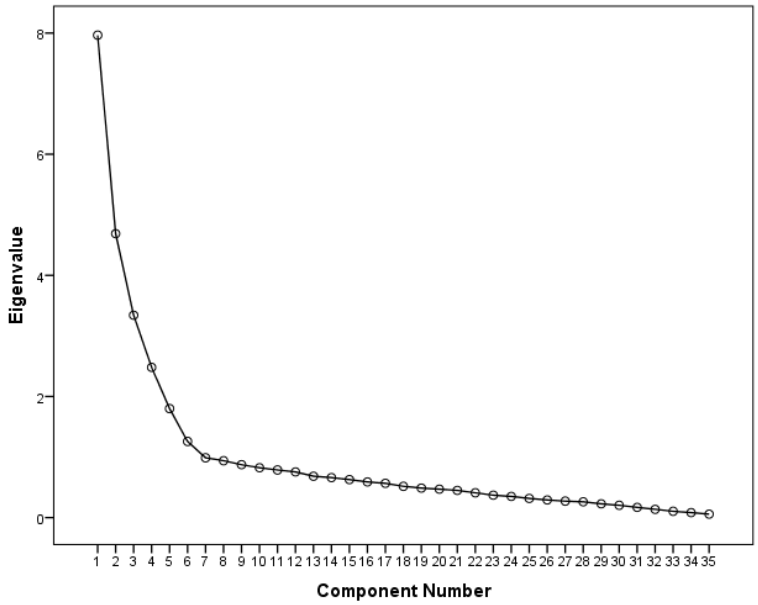

Figure 7 Screen plot of extracted factors with corresponding eigenvalues from the final iteration

The five factors extracted using the varimax rotation approach were the same as those predefined in the underlying theory. Their resulting factor loadings ranged from 0.42 to 0.84, as Table 10 shows. The outcomes for the scales of women's leadership were 35 items loading on five dimensions (factors):

1. Ten items were loading on factor 1 (organisational challenges), ranging from 0.432 to 0.842.
2. Ten items were loading on factor 2 (cultural challenges), ranging from 0.574 to 0.836.
3. Six items were loading on factor 3 (family-work balance), ranging from 0.575 to 0.833.
4. Six items were loading on factor 4 (personal barriers), ranging from 0.605 to 0.854.
5. Three items were loading on factor 5 (women's leadership roles), ranging from 0.670 to 0.911.

Table 10 Extracted factors and corresponding factor loadings obtained from the final iteration using the rotation approach

	1 Organisational challenges	2 Cultural challenges	3 Family-work balance	4 Personal barriers	5 Women in leadership roles
B6 Women in HE feel they have lower status than men	.842				
B12 The government should nurture more women leaders at decision-making levels	.804				
B1 There is a GC in HE preventing women from being promoted to senior positions	.798				
B4 Women leaders in HE feel isolated from their peers	.775				
B3 There is a presumption in HE that women are less able than men	.735				
B7 Men in leadership in HE have access to power	.716				
B9 Women in leadership have limited financial power	.652				
B11 Women in HE have to submit all decisions for male approval	.631				
B8 Men in HE promote young men and ignore women	.623				
B5 Women in HE lack support from their peers	.432				
C9 Women should be at home, not at work		.836			
C10 Women should not go to work, taking jobs from men		.803			
C5 In HE, only men are seen as having real leadership ability		.702			
C11 Women should put family before career		.670			
C4 Major decision making should be left to men		.668			
C13 Women should not combine work and motherhood		.623			
C12 Both women and men in HE are encouraged to pay attention to their families' needs		.622			
C3 A woman should sacrifice her own career for her husband's		.612			
C8 Looking after children is a woman's responsibility		.578			
C1 It is a man's duty to provide financially for his family		.574			
E2 Difficulties finding childcare			.833		
E4 Long hours create difficulty for mothers to advance their careers in HE			.809		

	1 Organisational challenges	2 Cultural challenges	3 Family-work balance	4 Personal barriers	5 Women in leadership roles
E1 Difficulties in balancing family and work prevent women from assuming leadership responsibilities			.799		
E6 Family and domestic duties mean that women in HE are less able than men to work overtime			.719		
E5 For working mothers to succeed it is essential for them to have support			.601		
E3 Women's childcare responsibilities are incompatible with leadership in HE			.575		
F9 Lack of experience in middle management roles negatively impacts applications for senior positions				.854	
F7 There is discrimination against non-Saudi academics in HE				.794	
F5 There is a lack of professional development programmes to prepare women leaders				.759	
F2 Women's leadership is characterised by interpersonal skills				.684	
F3 Young women academics in HE suffer more criticism from other staff than men				.658	
F6 Women feel personally apprehensive at undertaking leadership roles				.605	
G2 There is evidence in Islam supporting leadership roles for women					.911
G3 Evidence from Islamic literature indicates that women are capable leaders					.885
G1 According to Islam, women are allowed to occupy leadership roles					.670

5.4 Reliability

After exacting factors (dimensions) with corresponding items using EFA, it was very important to examine the reliability of the scale by measuring how closely related a set of items are as a group. Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) is a measure of internal consistency giving the reliability of each dimension. George and Mallery (2012) recommend the following thresholds: α > 0.9 – excellent; α > 0.8 – good; α > 0.7 – acceptable; α > 0.6 –

questionable; α > 0.5 – poor; α < 0.5 – unacceptable. Table 11 shows that α values ranged from acceptable to excellent, indicating that the overall reliability of the dimensions was satisfactory.

Table 11 Cronbach's alpha for the five dimensions

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha
Organisational challenges	0.902
Cultural challenges	0.820
Family-work balance	0.702
Personal barriers	0.838
Women in leadership roles	0.858

5.5 Normality assessment

Most statistical techniques assume that the probability distribution of numerical variables is normal. SPSS offers a number of techniques to assess normality, the most common being to measure skewness and kurtosis values (Pallant, 2007). According to Hair et al. (2003), skewness values larger than +2 or smaller than -2 indicate substantially skewed distributions. Similarly, a curve is too flat when kurtosis is below -2 and too peaked when it exceeds +2. The values of skewness and kurtosis for each variable in the present study, listed in Table 12, all lie within this range, indicating normality of distribution.

Table 12 Skewness and kurtosis values of the research variables

	Skewness	Kurtosis
Organisational challenges	-.403	-.375
Cultural challenges	1.073	.912
Family-work balance	-.764	-.008
Personal barriers	-.331	-.485
Women in leadership roles	-1.134	.271

In summary, Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix, indicating some degree of correlation between the variables. The EFA test

revealed five extracted factors which confirmed the underlying five variables: organisational challenges, cultural challenges, family-work balance, personal barriers and women's leadership roles. Cronbach's alpha values for all variables were above 0.7, confirming the reliability of the questionnaire. Finally, skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within the ±2 range, confirming the normality of the data.

Following the above results, tests were conducted on each individual variable, starting with descriptive tests for each question. These are discussed in the following sections.

5.6 Organisational challenges

The organisational barriers preventing women in higher education from achieving leadership positions in universities in Saudi Arabia were measured by 12 items. Responses to these items (as for those on all other variables) were quantified on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), then mean, median and standard deviation (SD) values were calculated to determine the relative importance of each item in defining organisational challenges. Table 13 shows that male leaders in HE were perceived to have greater access to power than women (75.1%) and that the female respondents felt themselves to have lower status than males (63.6%). In response, the government should nurture more women leaders at decision-making levels (62.9%). There was seen to be a glass ceiling preventing women from being promoted to senior positions (60.1%) and women said they had to submit all decisions for male approval (51.4%). These were the major barriers. The overall mean values in Table 13 show that female respondents tended to feel that organisational barriers were present in HE.

Table 13 Descriptive statistics for organisational challenges

Items	Strongly disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Neutral %	Tend to agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank
B1 There is a GC in HE preventing women from being promoted to senior positions	12.6	14.2	13.0	32.8	27.3	3.48	4.00	1.36	7
B2 Women working up the career ladder	8.3	12.6	25.7	27.7	25.7	3.50	4.00	1.23	6
B3 There is a presumption in HE that women are less able than men	9.1	11.9	19.4	28.9	30.8	3.60	4.00	1.28	4
B4 Women leaders in HE feel isolated from their peers	13.0	13.4	19.0	32.4	22.1	3.37	4.00	1.32	8
B5 Women in HE lack support from their peers	7.1	18.6	36.8	24.9	12.6	3.17	3.00	1.10	10
B6 Women in HE feel they have lower status than men	5.9	13.0	18.2	26.9	36.0	3.74	4.00	1.24	2
B7 Men in leadership in HE have access to power	5.9	7.1	11.9	29.6	45.5	4.02	4.00	1.18	1
B8 Men in HE promote young men and ignore women	10.7	20.2	32.4	22.1	14.6	3.10	3.00	1.20	12
B9 Women in leadership have limited financial power	11.9	14.2	28.1	17.8	28.1	3.36	3.00	1.34	9
B10 In HE, women's work skills are equal to men's	11.9	22.5	20.6	26.5	18.6	3.17	3.00	1.30	11
B11 Women in HE have to submit all decisions for male approval	5.9	10.3	32.4	27.3	24.1	3.53	4.00	1.14	5
B12 The government should nurture more women leaders at decision-making levels	5.5	12.3	19.4	26.1	36.8	3.76	4.00	1.22	3
Overall organisational barriers						3.48	3.50	.845	

The data were next categorised by residence. Table 14 compares the average responses on organisational challenges of those who had always resided in Saudi Arabia with those who had also resided abroad, showing that people in both groups agreed that these challenges were an issue and that there was little difference in mean scores (3.59 and 3.43 respectively). The t-test showed the difference between the two groups to be statistically insignificant (p=.193).

Table 14 Responses on organisational challenges by residence, using the t-test for two independent groups

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
Lived outside SA	No	3.59	.773	1.305	.193
	Yes	3.43	.871		

The data on organisational challenges were then categorised by respondents' qualifications and the group means compared (Table 15). Those holding a master's degree tended to agree with the statements on organisational challenges (mean=3.61), whilst the PhD and bachelor's groups were somewhat more neutral, with respective means of 3.39 and 3.27, but one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference among the three groups (p=.074). The level of qualification does not influence scores in this factor.

Table 15 Responses on organisational challenges by qualification, using one-way ANOVA

Education level	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Bachelor's	3.27	1.021	2.63	.074
Master's	3.61	.748		
PhD	3.39	.886		

Next, the data were categorised by the number of children. Table 16 shows that mean scores ranged from 3.11 to 3.93, with stronger agreement on organisational challenges corresponding to a smaller number of children. One-way ANOVA showed this difference to be statistically significant (p<.001). Not only did the group with no children register the strongest perception of organisational challenges; the mean strength of responses declined consistently with a rise in the number of children. It may be that women with more children perceived organisational barriers to leadership to be lower because they felt personal barriers such as work-life balance to be proportionally greater.

Table 16 Responses on organisational challenges by number of children using one-way ANOVA

Children	Mean	SD	F	p-value
No children	3.93	.78	7.66	<.001
1-2 children	3.51	.72		
3-5 children	3.29	.92		
>5 children	3.11	.62		

Table 17 compares single with married women on mean scores for their responses regarding organisational challenges, which were 3.83 and 3.26 respectively. The t-test revealed this difference to be significant (p<.001). This result is consistent with that on numbers of children, suggesting that single women with no children, having fewer familial

responsibilities, were likely to perceive higher organisational barriers than those who were married with children.

Table 17 Responses on organisational challenges by marital status using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
	Single	3.83	.73	5.01	<.001
	Married	3.26	.78		

5.7 Cultural challenges

Table 18 shows the perceived relative importance of cultural challenges by listing mean and median responses to the nine items used to measure this dimension. It can be seen that participants tended to disagree with the statements and that their overall attitude was negative. More than half disagreed that major decisions should be made by men (60.5%), that women and men were encouraged by HE to pay attention to their families' needs (56.9%) and that women should put family before career (64.4%). There was even less agreement on a man's supposed duty to provide financially for his family (70%) and on only men being having real leadership ability (70.7%), while more than three-quarters of participants rejected the notion that looking after children was a woman's responsibility (75.9%) and that a woman should sacrifice her career for her husband's (78.7%).

Table 18 Descriptive statistics for cultural challenges

Items	Strongly disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Neutral %	Tend to agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank
C1 It is a man's duty to provide financially for his family	60.6	9.4	6.3	8.3	15.4	2.08	1.00	1.54	4
C3 A woman should sacrifice her own career for her husband's	53.4	25.3	11.1	6.7	3.6	1.82	1.00	1.10	8
C4 Major decision making should be left to men	33.6	26.9	18.2	13.8	7.5	2.35	2.00	1.28	1
C5 In HE, only men are seen as having real leadership ability	49.4	21.3	11.5	8.3	9.5	2.07	2.00	1.34	5
C8 Looking after children is a woman's responsibility	54.9	19.8	8.7	9.9	6.7	1.94	1.00	1.28	6
C9 Women should be at home, not at work	56.9	19.0	14.6	3.2	6.3	1.83	1.00	1.18	7
C10 Women should not go to work, taking jobs from men	70.8	14.6	5.9	4.7	4.0	1.57	1.00	1.06	10
C11 Women should put family before career	43.1	21.3	16.2	12.3	7.1	2.19	2.00	1.30	3
C12 Both women and men in HE are encouraged to pay attention to their families' needs	37.5	19.4	23.3	12.3	7.5	2.33	2.00	1.29	2
C13 Women should not combine work and motherhood	58.1	22.9	9.1	5.5	4.3	1.75	1.00	1.11	9
Overall cultural challenges						1.99	1.90	.86	

Responses on cultural barriers were analysed using the same demographic categories as the data on organisational barriers. First, Table 19 shows that there was a statistically insignificant difference in mean scores between those living inside and outside Saudi Arabia. The mean scores for both groups were around 2, which indicate that they did not see cultural barriers as affecting them.

Table 19 Responses on cultural challenges by residence using the t-test for two independent groups

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
Lived outside SA	No	2.03	.862	.405	.053
	Yes	1.97	.410		

Similarly, when the data on cultural barriers were categorised by educational qualifications, all groups were found to disagree overall with the statements, with mean values around 2, and the differences among them were not significant (Table 20).

Table 20 Responses on cultural challenges by qualification using one-way ANOVA

	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Bachelor's	2.17	.93	.893	.411
Master`s	1.92	.76		
PhD	2.03	.93		

Categorising respondents by number of children, their mean responses on cultural challenges were found to be much lower than those on organisational challenges, but they varied in exactly the same way: the mean was higher for those with fewer children and the difference was significant (Table 21). Using Bonferroni, significant differences were found between no children and 3-5 children (p-value=.001) and between no children and >5 children (p-value=.027). This indicates that women with larger families tended to express stronger disagreement with the existence of cultural challenges. One of the possible reasons for this could be that women with more children are more likely to accept their role of homemaker as natural, compared with women having fewer or no children, who may be somewhat more resistant to such stereotyping.

Table 21 Responses on cultural challenges by number of children using one-way ANOVA

Children	Mean	SD	F	p-value
No children	1.62	.80	6.21	<.001
1-2 children	1.88	.65		
3-5 children	2.18	.95		
>5 children	2.36	.98		

Table 22 shows that as with organisational challenges, the difference in mean response to cultural challenge items between single (1.72) and married (2.12) women was significant (p=.002) and consistent with the result for the number of children.

Table 22 Responses on cultural challenges by marital status using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
	Single	1.72	.79	3.16	.002
	Married	2.12	.87		

5.8 Family-work balance

Family-work balance was measured by the six statements listed in Table 23, which shows that among the important challenges for the participants appeared to be long working hours creating difficulty for working mothers to advance their careers (63.6% agreed), difficulties in balancing family and work which prevent women from assuming leadership responsibilities (58.9%) and family and domestic duties resulting in women being not as able as men to work overtime (65.2%). Overall, the participants agreed that there were challenges to family-work balance, as shown by the mean and median values.

Table 23 Descriptive statistics for family-work balance challenges

Items	Strongly disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Neutral %	Tend to agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank
E1 Difficulties in balancing family and work prevent women from assuming leadership responsibilities	12.6	13.4	15.0	36.8	22.1	3.42	4.00	1.31	5
E2 Difficulties finding childcare	9.1	7.5	11.9	36.0	35.6	3.81	4.00	1.25	2
E3 Women's childcare responsibilities are incompatible with leadership in HE	9.5	19.0	20.6	.8	36.0	3.27	4.00	1.20	6
E4 Long hours create difficulty for mothers to advance their careers in HE	8.7	13.8	13.8	34.4	29.2	3.62	4.00	1.28	4
E5 For working mothers to succeed it is essential for them to have support	7.1	1.2	3.6	25.3	62.8	4.36	5.00	1.11	1
E6 Family and domestic duties mean that women in HE are less able than men to work overtime	9.9	12.3	12.6	26.9	38.3	3.72	4.00	1.35	3
Overall family-work balance						3.69	4.17	.929	

Comparing permanent residents of Saudi Arabia with those who had resided elsewhere, there was found to be no significant difference in their responses to items concerning family-work balance, as Table 24 shows.

Table 24 Responses on family-work balance by residence using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
Lived outside SA	No	3.82	1.02	1.41	.160
	Yes	3.62	.91		

When the data were categorised by level of academic qualification, by contrast, Table 25 reveals highly significant differences in perceptions of the challenges associated with family-work balance. The Bonferroni test showed that the significant difference was between the master's and PhD groups (p-value=.001). While members of all three groups tended to agree that they faced such challenges, the mean score varied inversely with level of education, so that the highest score was among those with a bachelor's degree and the lowest among PhD holders. In other words, individuals with lower qualifications had more difficulty in managing their work-life balance. This may be because they are more likely to occupy lower management positions with lower salaries, leading to a perception that the salary is not commensurate with the effort invested in managing work-life balance. Better-educated people, occupying higher management positions and earning more, may conversely find the rewards sufficient for their efforts to manage their work-life balance. For example, they may be more able to afford to employ maids and other domestic help, thus giving them a better work-life balance than those earning less.

Table 25 Responses on family-work balance by qualification using one-way ANOVA

	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Bachelor's	4.00	1.00	7.743	.001
Master's	3.90	.720		
PhD	3.47	1.031		

When the responses on family-work balance challenges are analysed by number of children, Table 26 shows that as the number of children increased, mean scores declined, indicating that it was women with smaller families who tended to agree more strongly that they faced challenges related to family-work balance. This is somewhat surprising, because women with more children might generally be expected to be more likely to face such challenges. For example, the cost of arranging childcare alternatives is likely to increase as the number of children rises. However, one-way ANOVA showed the difference in mean scores to be insignificant, which suggests that there may be other factors affecting women's perception of work-life balance being a challenge to their rise to leadership, while number of children is not a determining factor.

Table 26 Responses on family-work balance by number of children using one-way ANOVA

Children	Mean	SD	F	p-value
No children	4.27	1.07	.569	.636
1-2 children	4.09	1.17		
3-5 children	4.02	1.22		
>5 children	3.95	1.11		

The analysis of responses on the challenges of family-work balance according to marital status also yielded a somewhat surprising result (Table 27): Both single and married women tended to agree that this was an issue for them and the t-test revealed a significant difference (p=.047), with single women appearing to find it more difficult to manage their work-life balance as compared to married women. This finding, which is contrary to the general perception that being married adds to a woman's familial responsibilities, may perhaps be explained by the nature of the sample if those who were single happened to include a number who were divorced. Divorced individuals are likely to face more pressure from work-life balance issues, because they cannot share their responsibilities a partner.

Table 27 Responses on family-work balance by marital status using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
	Single	4.26	.95	1.99	.047
	Married	3.93	1.19		

5.9 Personal barriers

Table 28 presents the descriptive statistics for responses to the six items on personal barriers, showing that more than half of participants (58.5%) agreed that there was a lack of professional development programmes to prepare women leaders. A similar percentage (58.1%) of respondents perceived applications for senior positions to be negatively affected by a lack of experience in middle management roles. Almost 60% saw discrimination against non-Saudi academics as a personal barrier, while slightly fewer (54.9%) believed women's leadership to be characterised by interpersonal skills. The overall averages indicate broad agreement on the existence of these personal barriers.

Table 28 Descriptive statistics for personal barriers

Items	Strongly disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Neutral %	Tend to agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank
F2 Women's leadership is characterised by interpersonal skills	4.0	15.8	24.9	30.0	25.3	3.57	4.00	1.14	4
F3 Young women academics in HE suffer more criticism from other staff than men	5.1	16.2	33.2	21.3	24.1	3.43	3.00	1.17	5
F5 There is a lack of professional development programmes to prepare women leaders	6.7	10.3	24.5	27.7	30.8	3.66	4.00	1.21	1
F6 Women feel personally apprehensive at undertaking leadership roles	6.7	15.0	29.2	34.0	15.0	3.36	3.00	1.11	6
F7 There is discrimination against non-Saudi academics in HE	6.7	11.5	22.1	31.2	28.5	3.63	4.00	1.20	3
F9 Lack of experience in middle management roles negatively impacts applications for senior positions	6.7	12.6	22.5	25.7	32.4	3.64	4.00	1.24	2
Overall personal barriers						3.54	3.67	.877	

While both residence groups tended to agree that there were barriers associated with personal factors, Table 29 shows that there was a significant difference in mean scores between them, with those who had always lived in the country perceiving such challenges more strongly. The difference in responses to these items could be explained by the different life experiences of individuals who had never lived abroad compared with those whose residence outside SA would have exposed them to cultural environments in which women were more likely to be employed outside the home. These experiences may have given the latter a better understanding of how to manage personal barriers than those without exposure to such cultures. For example, women who have lived outside SA may exhibit comparatively high motivation and confidence as a result of their experience of societies where women are seen to perform on a par with men and are treated accordingly. Conversely, those who have always lived within SA may accept gender-based roles without much resistance.

Table 29 Responses on personal barriers by residence using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
Lived outside SA	No	3.91	.69	3.66	<.001
	Yes	3.43	.91		

In common with family-work balance, responses to items on personal barriers were found to be positive for all levels of education, those with lower levels of academic qualification agreeing more strongly on average that they faced such challenges (Table 30). One-way ANOVA again revealed a highly significant difference (p=.012) between the three qualifications. The Bonferroni test showed that the bachelor's group was significantly different from the master's (p-value=.024) and PhD groups (p-value=.009).

Table 30 Responses on personal barriers by qualification using one-way ANOVA

	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Bachelor's	4.11	.76	4.51	.012
Master's	3.55	.85		
PhD	3.47	.88		

The results indicate that with higher qualifications, the perception of personal barriers being a challenge declines. A possible explanation is that individuals with higher qualification are likely to be in senior roles and to have worked for longer than those with lower qualifications, who are more likely to be in entry-level positions. Thus, individuals with higher qualifications may have learnt to handle their personal challenges better, so perceiving them less strongly, because over the duration of a longer career their confidence and motivation have strengthened, for example.

Table 31 shows clearly that the number of children had no significant relationship with respondents' perceptions of personal barriers. Mean values for three of the four groups were very close and one-way ANOVA returned a high p-value of .751. This indicates that while individuals with larger families might be expected to experience personal challenges, these would tend to be related to family-work balance, which was tested separately,

whereas the section of the questionnaire on personal challenges included no items related to the family.

Table 31 Responses on personal barriers by the number of children using one-way ANOVA

Children	Mean	SD	F	p-value
No children	3.77	.84	.403	.751
1-2 children	3.71	1.01		
3-5 children	3.71	.91		
>5 children	3.46	.98		

Similarly, Table 32 reveals no significant difference between single and married women in their responses to items on personal barriers. Once again, the explanation for these findings may lie in the fact that the questionnaire had no questions related to family factors in the personal challenges section.

Table 32 Responses on personal barriers by marital status using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
	Single	3.82	.62	1.16	.246
	Married	3.66	.97		

5.10 Women in leadership roles

The final section of the questionnaire, on women in leadership roles, comprised three items. The descriptive statistics in Table 33 show that more than four-fifths of participants (83.4%) agreed that there is evidence in Islam supporting leadership roles for women. Finally, almost two-thirds agreed that Islam permits women to be leaders, there being no legal texts to the contrary. In all three cases, more than half of respondents agreed strongly with the statements on religious support for Moslem women in leadership roles.

Table 33 Descriptive statistics for women in leadership roles

Items	Strongly disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Neutral %	Tend to agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank
G2 There is evidence in Islam supporting leadership roles for women	5.9	2.4	8.3	19.0	64.4	4.34	5.00	1.12	1
G3 Evidence from Islamic literature indicates that women are capable leaders	11.1	6.3	12.3	13.8	56.5	3.98	5.00	1.39	2
G1 According to Islam, women are allowed to occupy leadership roles	11.1	6.7	16.6	12.3	53.4	3.90	5.00	1.40	3
Overall women in leadership roles						4.07	5.00	1.15	

The statistical analysis in Table 34 shows that the mean strength of agreement with the items on women in leadership roles differed insignificantly between women who had and had not lived outside Saudi Arabia. This is understandable, because the items in this section were not related to people's personal experiences but rather to their objective knowledge of Islam and to their religious beliefs, based on their understanding of the Quran, which would not be expected to be affected by their experiences of other cultures and nations.

Table 34 Responses on women in leadership roles by residence using the t-test

		Mean	SD	T	p-value
Lived outside SA	No	4.19	1.14	.792	.429
	Yes	4.05			

Similarly, while Table 35 shows that respondents at the lowest level of academic qualification agreed slightly less strongly on average than those with a master's degree or doctorate, one-way ANOVA reveals this difference in perceptions regarding women in leadership roles to be insignificant (p=.506).

Table 35 Responses on women in leadership roles by qualification using one-way ANOVA

	Mean	SD	F	p-value
Bachelor's	3.77	1.08	.682	.506
Master's	4.10	1.10		
PhD	4.09	1.22		

The same is seen to be true of the number of children, with mean responses on leadership roles differing insignificantly among the four groups, as Table 36 reveals.

Table 36 Responses on women in leadership roles by number of children using one-way ANOVA

Children	Mean	SD	F	p-value
No children	3.66	.83	.851	.467
1-2 children	3.61	.93		
3-5 children	3.46	.86		
>5 children	3.45	.86		

The final comparison in this analysis, between single and married women, once again shows that there was no significant difference in mean responses to items on women in leadership roles (Table 37).

Table 37 Responses on women in leadership roles by marital status using the t-test

		Mean	SD	t	p-value
	Single	3.64	.82	1.74	.082
	Married	3.41	.90		

5.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented an analysis of the questionnaire survey results. The dataset comprised responses to closed questions on a 5-point Likert scale. Sample analysis indicates that the sample adequately represented the different demographics. The five scales of women's leaderships were measured by 51 questionnaire items. Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix, confirming the existence of correlations between the items (variables). This was essential to proceed with EFA, which was used to determine whether the scales were loaded on a single factor or

multiple factors. Four iterations of the KMO and Bartlett's tests were carried out and EFA revealed that the five factors extracted using the rotation approach were the same as predefined in the underlying theory: Organisational challenges, Cultural challenges, Family-work balance, Personal barriers and Women in leadership roles.

The satisfactory reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each dimension, with values ranging from acceptable (>0.70) to excellent (>0.90). Skewness and kurtosis values for all of the variables also fell within the ±2 range, confirming the normality of the data. Given this normal distribution, parametric tests of comparison were used. To test differences in scales of women's roles between two groups, such as single and married respondents, the t-test for two independent samples was used, whereas one-way ANOVA was used for three or more groups (e.g. qualifications).

The data, having been categorised by respondents' marital status, qualifications, residence and number of children, were subjected to between-group comparison to determine whether these categories corresponded to differences in respondents' perceptions of cultural, organisation and personal barriers or of women's leadership in Islam and thus whether their demographic characteristics could explain any difference in the responses of individuals.

Responses indicated that the main organisational barriers affecting women were male domination in decision making and fewer leadership opportunities for women, combined with the presumption that women are not capable of acting as leaders. Consequently, the respondents suggested that there should be concerted efforts to promote women in leadership positions. Between-group comparisons showed no variations corresponding to differences in residency or qualifications. However, statically significant differences were found between groups based on family size and marital status, with single women and those with fewer children reporting comparatively stronger perceptions of organisational barriers. This may be because married women and those with larger families are more focused on familial and societal challenges than on organisational ones. Since the data are perceptual, this result may indicate that women with fewer familial responsibilities perceive higher organisational barriers.

Respondents did not tend to agree that cultural challenges hampered their quest for leadership. This is quite interesting, because there is a wider perception that cultural factors constitute a major barrier to leadership for Saudi Arabian women. Part of this could be attributed to the nature of the questionnaire items, which required respondents to comment on their agreement with statements referring to these purported cultural barriers. Between-group comparisons showed no variations in responses on cultural barriers related to residency outside SA or to educational qualifications. However, statically significant differences were found between groups constructed on the basis of family size and marital status, whereby married women and those with more children reported comparatively strong perceptions of cultural barriers.

Work-life balance statements received strong support from the respondents. Most agreed that finding the right family-work balance is challenging for working mothers and that this hampers their progression to leadership. Long working hours and the inability to take overtime due to familial responsibilities were also cited as important barriers. Respondents agreed that if they received support in balancing family and work, they would be better positioned for leadership. Between-group comparisons showed no variations correlated with residency or number of children. However, statistically significant differences were found between groups on the basis of educational qualifications and marital status. The results indicate that individuals with lower qualifications found poor work-life balance more challenging, as did single women, contrary to the perception that this challenge mainly affects married women with large families.

Respondents tended to agree fairly strongly that personal factors represented barriers to achieving leadership, highlighting a lack of professional development programmes and inexperience in middle management roles as some of the key personal barriers. Statistically significant differences were found between groups based on residency and qualifications, whereas these were insignificant in the cases of the number of children and marital status. This could be because there were no statements in the personal barriers section related to familial responsibilities, which were covered instead in the family-work balance section.

Finally, respondents tended to support strongly the assertions that Islam allows women to take leadership positions, that Islamic literature offers evidence of women being capable

leaders and that there is evidence in Islam supporting leadership roles for women. No statistically significant differences were found between any of the groups on this factor, showing that respondents, irrespective of their profile, believed that Islamic principles do not oppose women's participation in leadership.

Some of the findings from the questionnaire survey were counterintuitive or surprising. First, survey respondents with fewer children reported experiencing higher levels of organisational barriers. This may be because individuals with more children are more concerned about other barriers related to family size, such as work-life balance. This finding is in line with the result related to marital status, as single individuals seemed more concerned about organisational barriers, while married ones were more concerned about work-life balance issues. This is an interesting finding, because it means that a stronger perception of one barrier could lead to a lowered perception of another. It also indicates that people's perceptions of each barrier may depend on their personal circumstances, despite the barrier being the same.

Surprisingly, in the questionnaire survey, women's perception of cultural barriers was also inversely proportional to their number of children. This could be because women with larger families tend to accept their roles as mothers and homemakers, whereas women who do not wish to conform to such roles may choose to have smaller families.

Family-work balance challenges were also found to be inversely proportional to an individual's level of qualifications, with those holding a bachelor's degree reporting greater difficulties. This could be either because of heavier work pressure on lower qualified staff or because of their lack of experience and resources in managing their work-life balance.

Surprisingly, the survey results indicate that single women found it more difficult than married women to manage their work-life balance. This could be because the sample contained a number of divorced mothers who self-reported as single and indeed, divorced women with children are likely to face significant work-life balance issues.

Chapter 6 Qualitative Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the qualitative data gathered from women working in Saudi higher education, complementing the quantitative analysis of the survey data presented in Chapter 5. The inclusion of a qualitative arm was considered essential for this feminist research conducted in a conservative society (Porta, 2008; Denzin, 2003). Qualitative methods allow researchers to learn flexibly about people's behaviours, perceptions and emotions through a direct one-to-one engagement with the individuals concerned. It helps to enhance knowledge not only of what problems affect them or their organisations, but also of how and why these problems exist. The analysis of qualitative data such as interview transcripts is useful in gaining insights which quantitative methods often cannot provide because of their indirect and structured approach.

The qualitative data discussed in this chapter were collected during 15 semi-structured individual interviews, then subjected to the thematic analysis technique explained in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6.5).

This chapter is organised as follows: Section 6.2 outlines the characteristics of the interview sample in terms of position, experience and length of service, then Section 6.3 analyses their responses regarding the current state of women's leadership in Saudi HEIs. Section 6.4 is divided into three subsections, discussing in turn the data on the different organisational, cultural and personal barriers and how these affect Saudi women in terms of their ability, motivation and opportunities to achieve leadership positions in higher education. Section 6.5 considers interviewees' perceptions of the Saudi government's Vision 2030 plan and Section 6.6 discusses their suggestions for policy reforms to address the problems raised in the earlier analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary and synthesis.

6.2 Sample analysis

The technique adopted to recruit the all-female sample for the interviews is explained in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6.3). Outline profiles of the individual interviewees and the codes by which they are referred to in the analysis are set out in Table 38.

Table 38 Profiles of interviewees

Code	Position	Total experience (years)	Years in the current organisation	Years in current position
SPROF_17	Senior Professor	17	3	3
HOD_21	Head of Department	21	16	5
DOF_26	Dean of Faculty	26	21	4
DCP_18	Department Chairperson	18	18	>1
HOD_15	Head of Department	15	15	3
HOA_21	Head of Administration	21	21	7
SPROF_13	Senior Professor	13	11	3
HOD_20	Head of Department	20	20	6
SLEC_17	Senior Lecturer	17	10	4
DOF_24	Dean of Faculty	24	15	3
HOD_23	Head of Department	23	19	8
SPROF_20	Senior Professor	20	2	2
DOF_29	Dean of Faculty	29	24	6
HOD_33	Head of Department	33	30	7
DOA_31	Dean of Administration	31	16	6

Participants' total experience in HEIs, reflected in the codes assigned to them, varied from 13 to 33 years and can be seen to correspond broadly to the seniority of their positions, suggesting that Saudi HEIs may adopt an experience-based promotion strategy. It is indeed quite common in Saudi institutions to use people's experience as a gauge of their expertise and capability, perhaps because the national culture is one of high power distance and high collectivism, based on tribal traditions whereby status tends to reflect age, with older people commanding more respect than younger ones (Siddique, Khan and Zia, 2016). In Saudi universities, it is quite common for experience to be used as a key criterion in deciding promotion (Albaqami, 2016), but the tribal traditions underlying the culture may not be the only reason for this. An alternative explanation is that it is difficult to evaluate the performance of academic staff directly, so the experience is considered a fair, objective and more or less indisputable criterion for promotion decisions.

A few interesting observations can be made regarding the data in Table 6.1. All but two of the 15 interviewees had worked in their current organisation for more than ten years. Although the data do not indicate whether women are less likely to change employers than men are, they do suggest that Saudi female employees tend not to do so very often. More specifically, most interviewees are seen to have gained a significant proportion of their total work experience in their current organisations. Although the sample is too small to permit generalisation, it indicates that female university employees may tend to move to other organisations infrequently and to be more likely to remain in the same organisations for prolonged periods. This is understandable because of the relative shortage of public sector jobs, combined with lower salaries and fewer benefits in private sector employment, which may make job switching an unattractive option for Saudi women. There may also be an effect of familiarisation with work and workplace, as was evident in one interviewee's comments:

> *I like being in such a large community of scholars and teachers every day... It is like a social community here. .... Imagine having a circle of friends who you meet every day and spend the whole day with... I don't like being behind closed walls.*

Interestingly, this comment shows that women are using work not only for professional purposes but also as an opportunity to go out and socialise. Working in universities allows them to build a social network of colleagues which they may find difficult to leave, probably due to the collectivist social culture of Saudi Arabia.

The long tenure of women employees is interesting because it indicates that they are likely to have good experience of working in the same organisations and are therefore likely to be more aware of the different aspects of working in that particular organisation. Long-serving employees are likely to be more effective leaders, especially in organisations like universities, because of the nature of the work (Albaqami, 2016). For example, they are likely to be more aware of the culture of the organisation and the long-term issues that staff and students face. Universities do not operate commercially and their objectives can be achieved through long-term sustained efforts to develop their human resources, both students and staff. Individuals with long service in the same organisation have a better understanding of the kind of policies required and the context in which they are to be

implemented (Azeem and Akhtar, 2014). For this reason, it is essential to give long-term university employees a stronger voice in making decisions.

The numbers in the final column of Table 6.1 show that people in higher positions had a significant length of service in their current roles, with most such participants reporting that they had worked a number of years in the same position. There are two possible reasons for this: it could be that there were not enough positions at the top, or alternatively that women were not being promoted to the top. The number of female leaders of universities in Saudi Arabia makes the latter explanation seem more likely, but it must be noted that there are fewer positions at the top. For example, Albaqami (2016) notes that the student/teacher ratio in Saudi public-sector universities is 16 to 1 for male students and 27 to 1 for females.

Two of the 15 interviewees had begun their careers in non-academic organisations, one as a psychiatrist and other in a government post. Apart from one woman who had taken a break from her academic career to work in banking before returning to academia as a professor, all of the remaining interviewees had worked within the university environment throughout their lives. This indicates that the education sector is particularly desirable for Saudi women, offering not only a favourable and stable work environment but also attractive salaries (Albaqami, 2016).

6.3 Current state of women's leadership in Saudi higher education

During the interviews, participants were first asked to reflect on the usefulness of women's leadership for Saudi Arabian HEIs. Table 39 summarises their responses.

Table 39 Summary of interview responses to whether women's leadership is critical for Saudi HEIs

Is women's leadership critical for Saudi HEIs?			
SPROF_17		HOD_20	
HOD_21		SLEC_17	
DOF_26		DOF_24	
DCP_18		HOD_23	
HOD_15		SPROF_20	
HOA_21		DOF_29	
SPROF_13		HOD_33	
		DOA_31	
Legend			
Neutral			
Yes		No	

Almost all interviewees (14 of the 15) agreed that it was absolutely critical for Saudi HEIs to have women leaders. Various reasons were cited for this strong conviction, some of the most common being '*having an insider as leader*', '*using a different leadership style*' from that of men and '*using the in-house experience of team members*'. Participants seemed quite confident in reporting that women leaders can improve the overall standard of management in HEIs by helping to fill a void in existing management practices. For example, HOD_15 said:

> *I would say not just critical but absolutely critical. I know this because I have been playing a leadership role for a long time, and I know what we bring to the table. .... I think it is absolutely essential to have women leaders in education.*

Interviewees seemed ***proud*** of being able to play a meaningful dual role as both homemakers and professionals, thus demonstrating their ability to take care of multiple and diverse roles and work under pressure. They seemed not only certain of the leadership qualities of women but also convinced that women leaders can help eliminate key weaknesses in current management practices such as the gap between managers and employees. Participants suggested that women leaders are required because they experience the challenges typically faced by female staff and students through their day-to-day interactions, which would not be possible between male leaders and female staff because of gender segregation. DOF_29 explained that this was because female leaders

… understand things about women better. Understanding their needs is the issue here. Why do we have experienced individuals as leaders? Because they understand everything better.... Men do not come to the campus, so if they haven't seen anything, how can they decide about it? They will not be able to see what challenges female students and staff face and how they spend their time. I think we are in a much better position to evaluate and decide.

Others suggested that in their daily lives, women often play many roles which require leadership qualities and that the proficiency with which they do so is evidence of their ability to occupy leadership positions at work. For example, SLEC_17 commented:

It's essential to have women in senior positions in Saudi higher education.... as important as the men, or maybe more so, because women are natural leaders in their homes, in their schools, in society.

Some interviewees argued against the misconception that women are not strong characters. According to them, the ability of women to play their familial and professional roles is evidence of their ***strength***. Women and men are known to have different leadership styles. For example, women are more likely to practice a more inclusive, caring, supportive and democratic style of leadership than men (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Participants asserted that women have a strong ***sense of responsibility***, probably arising from their maternal nature, which requires them to be intuitively extra careful. This different management style was the main reason why women should be included in top-level positions, especially in HEIs, according to participants including SLEC_17:

Women are emotional, yes, but it's needed in this particular field. ..I think women bring something interesting to management: more empathy as compared to men. So they can make places like universities more enjoyable and more social.

The nature of individuals often affects their leadership practices. Autocratic people are more likely to practise centralised, top-down leadership based on hierarchy. On the other hand, female leaders have a greater tendency to inclusiveness, focusing on all-round development rather than on concrete results (Al Ghamdi, 2016). This was evident in this response of HOD_33:

With women leaders it is more likely you will see programmes for the development of students as well as faculty. Currently we have a very basic model of teaching and learning. The place is not as much fun, social and inclusive.

In this respect, some interviewees seemed quite bemused that something which should be considered of value is seen as a weakness in women's ability to lead. According to HOD_20, for example, it is essential to harness the true leadership qualities of women rather than selectively choosing male-specific characteristics as constituting true leadership:

The problem is that as leaders, women are expected to work just like men, despite not being given the same powers and control.

One of the problems identified by participants was male leaders' lack of understanding of the critical issues facing the staff and students in female universities, which may affect their ability to lead female staff effectively. Several women presented strikingly similar views on this particular aspect. SLEC_17 is typical of these:

It is not impossible but very difficult for Saudi males to design such policies, because of the nature of our society, where men know very little about women.

The problem, in these women's opinion, was much wider than male leaders being unable to interact directly with their followers, but rather that the culture of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia makes men generally oblivious to issues faced by women (AlDoubi, 2014). This leads to inadequate decision making, which in certain cases may worsen the situation. In other words, male leaders may lack the ability to lead largely female organisations (Al Ghamdi, 2016).

This being so, the shortage of women leaders may cause a disconnect between the leadership and the team. Effective leaders are most likely to be those who can engage in direct, continuous, two-way communication with their followers. This is a challenge in Saudi society if the leader is of a different gender, because gender segregation may create an artificial barrier to communication, thereby impeding his ability to lead (Al Ghamdi, 2016). As DOA_31 commented:

Leadership is not about chairing a meeting once a month. It is about engaging on a day-to-day basis, identifying issues and helping to resolve those issues.

Thus, interviewees believed that gender segregation gives Saudi men little knowledge or understanding of the nature, behaviour, perceptions and needs of women, making it difficult for them to develop the right policies for females. HOA_21 put it like this:

> *We cannot expect men to form the right educational environment for women. What do they know about women?*

Most of the women seemed to agree with the view that male and female personalities and consequently their leadership styles are quite different, at least at a general level, and expressed disappointment that only male characteristics tend to be considered suitable for leadership positions in Saudi HEIs. This 'us and them' perspective is illustrated by the words of DOF_29:

> *Women have different environmental needs to men, especially Saudi women because you know our culture. As a woman, I'm more likely to understand the environmental needs of female students and staff than men.*

When asked for an example, she said:

> *Women's socialisation behaviour is completely different from men's. We like different kinds of environment. We seek calm and relaxation, while men seek something exciting. So we need elements on the campus which are suitable for women's needs and behaviour.*

DCP_18 made a related point:

> *I'm sure that women are likely to understand what we need much better than a man who has had no interaction with staff and students. University leaders should be on campus, reachable any time for staff and students.*

These contributions highlight the fact that a culture of gender segregation limits Saudi men's knowledge of the needs, behaviour and expectations of Saudi women, making them ineffective as leaders of teams consisting largely of women. Most interviewees argued that segregation means that only females can be fully involved with the day-to-day activities of the female university staff. This continuous involvement is essential for leaders to identify problems and solutions, as well as understanding the environment in which these solutions are to be implemented. Lack of engagement between male leaders and female middle

managers may cause strategic weakness, as the strategy is imposed from the top down, rather than consensually, with feedback from middle and senior female managers who actually operationalise it. In this respect, the current organisational model, combined with the culture of gender segregation, deprives female managers of the opportunity to contribute fully at strategic levels.

Many women argued that having male leaders creates a communication barrier between female staff members and their leaders, as the former are reluctant to reach out to the men who lead them because of gender segregation. SPROF_17 commented:

> *If you don't have women leaders for women employees then basically you are in a situation where the leader has no idea about what the people that they are leading feel, what issues they face and how to overcome those issues. Having women leaders is important to give women a voice.*

DOF_26 disagreed that female leaders are critical for Saudi female universities, however, suggesting a lack of commitment:

> *I know many women who just come to work because they have to. For them it is more like a way of getting out of the house and the routine but otherwise little passion for teaching itself.*

This long-serving academic considered it more important to have effective leaders who are easy to reach and understand and who can solve the problems of staff and students etc.—in other words, a leader of proven ability—than someone of a particular gender. When probed further, she agreed that under the current system female leaders would be more approachable and aware of the issues faced by female staff:

> *We need leaders who understand women and can develop policies to support their growth and development... We need closer dialogue between leaders and employees.*

She saw the problem as a lack of connection (i.e. interaction and communication) between male leaders and female team members and agreed that under current gender segregation norms the only way to overcome this disconnection would be to appoint female leaders.

Now given the structure of our society, I think having a woman at the top will make it easier. But if we can improve dialogue and understanding without having a woman leader, then I am fine with that too.

A similar point was made by SPROF_20:

Most of the women who give up work in order to balance family and work-life... All we need is better-planned workplaces and policies for women to ensure little conflict between work and life.

Women understand better how to make provision for the needs of other women, allowing them to manage their work-life balance better (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). As mentioned before, the current organisational policies and systems were designed by men with little understanding of the lives of women. Women are more effective leaders not only because they can engage in the day-to-day activities (AlDoubi, 2014), but also because they have had long experience of working in those institutions, as reflected in the long service of most of the interviewees in their current organisations. This stability of employment helps women to understand and put into practice what works and avoid what does not in terms of the culture of their organisations, the needs of the staff, long-standing issues etc. (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Another dean, DOF_24, commented:

We know about the issues. I have worked for so long in this university that I know every brick and wall and pretty much every teacher, about their family, what issues they have and so on.

Such in-depth knowledge of the workforce at a personal level can be a huge asset for women leaders and it cannot be achieved by male leaders in Saudi Arabia, because they are not generally able to interact with female employees. Even in those few cases where they are allowed to do so, their knowledge of issues facing women will be largely limited to organisational matters, whereas female leaders can engage personally with female followers and identify ways in which their performance can be improved. Women, according to DCP_18,

… do experience a certain level of frustration at not being able to do certain things. The involvement of the leader is critical for the leader in making the right decisions.

She considered it futile to expect better performance from leaders who for one reason or another cannot interact directly and continuously with their staff. In her opinion, the lack of interaction can lead to poor decision making.

The final contribution in this section is from the interview with HOA_21:

> *We think leadership is about sitting comfortably at the top issuing instructions, but that's wrong. In a real sense, the job of the leader should be the most difficult because he or she is responsible for not one department but rather the whole institution.*

This is where women leaders are most effective for all-female universities, because individuals who have given long service at the same university know the staff members at a personal level and understand the organisational context in which their decisions are to be applied. They know the team and the students well, which gives them a superior ability to lead female staff as compared to males. Knowing those you are managing is essential, and their long association with the staff means that most female employees know the team members sufficiently in order to lead them effectively. There is thus a definite need for women leaders in Saudi HEIs.

6.4 Barriers to women's leadership

In light of the above discussion of the current state of women's leadership, this section reports on and analyses the next part of the interviews, where the focus was on identifying the barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions in Saudi HEIs.

Table 40 Summary of interview responses to whether Saudi women face barriers in rising to leadership in HEIs

Do Saudi women face barriers in rising to leadership positions in higher education institutions?			
SPROF_17		HOD_20	
HOD_21		SLEC_17	
DOF_26		DOF_24	
DCP_18		HOD_23	
HOD_15		SPROF_20	
HOA_21		DOF_29	
SPROF_13		HOD_33	
		DOA_31	
Legend			
Neutral			
Yes		No	

Responses summarised in Table 40 reflect the view that women in Saudi HEIs have ***inadequate representation*** at the leadership level, which deprives them of the opportunity to participate in making decisions. Most of the interviewees agreed that women currently have insufficient participation in leadership roles and all agreed that women face different kinds of barriers in rising to a leadership position. SPROF_13 made a general assertion:

> *Women face barriers around the world. Women are homemakers. It's a stereotyping that we are born with and have lived all our lives, so much so that it has become a reality for most people.*

When asked about changing this perception, SPROF_13 was uncertain of success:

> *Challenging this will not be easy, considering that so many other aspects of our social and cultural lives have been grounded in this pseudo-reality.*

Referring to women who may have the same personal life commitments as men, such as those whose children have reached adulthood, HOA_21 made this assessment:

> *If there is a woman and man competing for the same job and given everything else is equal, I think there is a 70 to 80% chance that the job will go to the man.*

According to her, even after discounting the familial commitments that they must fulfil, women still face barriers that indicate some sort of gender discrimination in leadership.

There were thus perceived to be disproportionate opportunities for men and women to lead, with the balance clearly in favour of men. Interviewees agreed that women fail to achieve leadership in Saudi public-sector organisations not because they lack ability or competence, but rather because a range of barriers prevents them from rising to the top. Next, they were asked specifically about their opinions as to which barriers were most critical. The following subsections deal successively with their responses regarding organisational, cultural and personal barriers.

6.4.1 Organisational barriers

Table 41 lists various organisational barriers to women's leadership discussed during the interviews and the numbers of women who agreed or disagreed that each of these applied to Saudi HEIs.

Table 41 List of perceived organisational barriers that may affect Saudi women's rise to leadership in HEIs

Organisational barrier	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/ no comment
Lack of leadership training	9	0	6
Lack of decision-making opportunities	11	0	4
No opportunities to obtain required qualifications	6	4	5
Not considered for top positions	12	0	3
Lack of required connections	4	3	8
Lack of exposure to leadership	10	1	4
Lack of authoritative power	12	0	3
No credit for achievements	9	0	6
Lack of clear promotion criteria	5	0	10
Stricter/biased promotion policy for women	8	0	7
Workload and burdensome administrative tasks	5	1	9
Disfavouring and uncooperative behaviours of peers and subordinates	7	4	4
Poor work-life management opportunities	6	3	6

While all of the interviewees agreed that women in Saudi HEIs faced organisational barriers to leadership, they differed in which of these they considered most prohibitive. The following analysis considers each barrier in turn and provides examples of the women's views.

Participants seemed generally ***disappointed*** by the lack of attention given to developing women leaders. While recognising the provision of some support for females to develop leadership skills, most argued that this was ***inadequate***, with the result that women had insufficient opportunities to improve their leadership skills. Several different aspects of this problem were raised. ***Lack of leadership training*** opportunities was identified as a key organisational barrier by many interviewees. HOD_21 was typical in complaining that women were not given the leadership training needed to prepare them for leadership positions:

> *Leadership is 50 percent skills and 50 percent experience. We don't have the right training programmes to prepare leaders.*

DOA_31 reiterated this view:

> *I think we need to provide more leadership training for women. Currently, they are poorly trained to lead, which is understandable, because we have had a history where only men were supposed to lead.*

When asked about whether they had received any leadership training, most interviewees reported having had some but complained that it was insufficient or inadequate. These responses, by SPROF_20, SPROF_13 andHOD_15, illustrate the perceived weaknesses:

> *We had a bit of training. I even went to South Korea for training, but I think it needs to be more practical rather than theoretical, I guess.*
>
> *Universities often tend to do training programmes as checklists, but I don't think there is any audit of how good these programmes actually are.*
>
> *Can you really teach me to become a leader? I think it is more about practice, talent management and development. It should be approached completely differently.*

Interviewees seemed ***confident*** that women could successfully occupy leadership roles if given adequate opportunities to train and adequate support. The lack of opportunities for leadership training could be to do with lack of opportunities to work as leaders, as was highlighted by SLEC_17:

Why would you have leadership training if you are not going to be a leader? We have some development programmes, yes, but nothing which will train us to be organisational leaders.

Most of the participants agreed that there would probably be more demand for and supply of such leadership programmes if there were more women leaders, as DCP_18 explained:

If we see women leaders we will feel motivated to learn and follow them. Then I think there will be a demand for leadership programmes. I know women who take private certification courses to boost their profile.

Lack of decision-making opportunities was mentioned as another organisational barrier. Participants expressed ***frustration*** that this affected their ability not only to develop as leaders but also to prove that they were able to make decisions. Many indeed appeared angry that women were not given sufficient opportunities to prove their leadership skills. The lack of opportunity was also said to stifle women's motivation to seek leadership roles. Some interviewees reported that women were excluded from making most high-level decisions in their organisations. This is not to say that they were not able to make any decisions, but the issue was male dominance of top-level decisions. For example, HOD_15 stated:

We have little freedom to make decisions. But I think we are used to this. Women in Saudi Arabia do not get to make most of the decisions, especially critical ones, so this is no surprise to me.

DOF_26 considered women both unable and unwilling to take decisions:

We have a common problem that women can't make decisions. They must get every decision approved by their boss... Sometimes women are reluctant to take decisions and sometimes institutional policies hinder their ability to take decisions, even if they want to.

For DOA_31, this reluctance often amounted to fear:

There is a constant fear in our minds about whether we're allowed to do this, are we supposed to do this? We are too fearful of making the wrong decisions. It's not

easy, because you know you are answerable and I think women are generally scared.

Participants expressed ***confidence*** that if women are given decision-making opportunities, they can quickly grow as effective leaders. However, they also asserted that these opportunities were limited for women in their organisations, preventing them from developing the confidence and courage to lead. Several, including HOD_23, suggested that women should be given decision-making responsibilities at an early stage, in order to improve their abilities as they gained experience:

We need to show confidence in women from quite early stages. It is important because confidence cannot be developed overnight. If we groom women to be leaders during their careers, then when they reach that point, they will be ready for leadership.

Another barrier mentioned was that of ***insufficient opportunities to obtain the required qualifications***. According to the interviewees, their male counterparts received breaks during their careers to obtain certain qualifications, whereas, for women, such breaks were mostly limited to pursuing academic qualifications.

HOD_15 clarified this with a very specific example:

One of the best ways for you to get recognition in the global academic community is by publishing a lot of journal articles, speaking at conferences and so on. But while men are promoted and funded for such opportunities, women rarely receive funding for this.

Indeed, one of the ways in which academics can boost their profiles and recognition among the global community is through participation in international conferences and seminars, where they can share their research with their peers from around the world, but women are not given the same kind of support for such activities as men are. HOD_15 did concede that the situation of research funding was now changing, with more women being funded, but limiting women's participation in such opportunities overall certainly constitutes a barrier to improving their skills and building a portfolio suitable for leadership positions.

Some other interviewees also raised the issue of poor support for women in acquiring certain qualifications which they believed would equip them for leadership positions.

Participants strongly suggested that factors such as poor support for obtaining qualifications and lack of leadership training indicate a ***reluctance to consider women for top positions***. HOA_21 stated this view bluntly:

> *I don't think there is any interest in developing leadership skills in women, because there is no real interest in giving top positions to women.*

HOD_33 made a similar point:

> *I have seen some programmes, but to be honest I don't think they really mean to achieve anything with this. It's like telling us: 'Look, we are trying but you are just not good enough'. It isn't taken seriously and I think women know this and so they are not serious about those programmes.*

SLEC_17 considered the problem to be more one of limited experience:

> *We need to develop leaders. The only problem is that since women have had little leadership experience in Saudi Arabia they may need a lot of training, mentoring, coaching to do that.*

She then elaborated by suggesting a way forward:

> *Not many women know how to lead as of now. So leadership development should be a continuous long-term strategy rather than just picking one person, putting her at the top... In Saudi, we have not looked at permanent long-term solutions.*

These excerpts reflect a general view that training contributes little to developing leadership skills and capabilities. Instead, leadership development is more about experience; therefore, it should involve giving women more opportunities to lead, rather than just giving them formal training on leadership. Most other interviewees agreed that little effort was made to develop women for leadership and that as they were unlikely to be ***considered for top positions***, there would be little point in such development in any case. The fact that there were so few leadership positions for women was the real barrier to any genuine efforts to improve their ability to lead.

Participants expressed ***disappointment*** that they were often not considered for leadership positions and ***frustration*** that despite being educated to a high level, women had still not achieved the same level of representation in the workforce, especially at the top level.

Some argued that unless organisational policies changed to ensure that each person had equal, unbiased and fair opportunities irrespective of gender, the imbalance would persist. Others suggested that the lack of interest in developing women for leadership was not limited to the management but extended to female staff members, because they felt that despite their best efforts, nothing would come of it. Thus, restricted opportunities weakened the motivation of female employees, as these words of SPROF_13 make clear:

> *As an insider you need to put in a lot of effort to rise through the ranks. I mean you need years of exceptional service, good connections and everything...You cannot imagine how it feels when you put in lot of effort but you get nothing out of it, and then you feel helpless because you want to do something amazing but you have no power.*

DOF_26 offered a more general judgement:

> *There are various barriers, so much so that as a woman I will not even think about the top position. ... There is definitely something preventing them.*

These women's remarks clearly demonstrate how a paucity of opportunity might inhibit motivation among their colleagues. Furthermore, DOF_26 reported knowing many individuals who had the credentials, experience and knowledge required to be leaders but who had retired without reaching the top positions. In her opinion, there was evidence of women being deliberately obstructed from reaching the top. Others, including HOD_23, contended that while both sexes faced barriers, those affecting women were of a different order:

> *Men face the normal challenges such as experience, performance etc. But women face different kinds of challenges. They are not even considered for top positions. It's not a challenge... because challenges you can overcome.*

In other words, the system itself appears to restrict opportunities for women. According to HOD_23, the widely held perception that women will not be promoted to leadership positions leads women themselves to lack the necessary motivation. SPROF_17 concurred:

> *All women know that they will never be promoted to a top leadership position. ...It's simply useless to try. You know, we try to conserve our energy to do things that we think are achievable.*

HOD_20 raised the matter of what positively does motivate women in academia:

> *For us academics, money is not the main issue. The main issue is recognition. When we get promotion it shows that our organisation values our work, our experience. But beyond a certain level we do not feel that it is worth doing more.*

According to her, female employees should be recognised for exceptional performance, such as that demonstrated by exemplary academic and research work. Such recognition, not necessarily in monetary form, would motivate women to boost their credentials by engaging more in research and development (Alzuman, 2015). Monetary compensation may not be as valuable for academics, because they will also take work-life balance into account. Recognising their efforts in the long term, such as through performance-based promotion, can be a useful strategy in motivating female academics (Alzuman, 2015).

Participants seemed ***unhappy*** at receiving unequal credit for their achievements compared with their male counterparts. ***Inadequate*** consideration of their achievements affects women's professional development by blunting their motivation to invest time and effort in pursuing them. Some other interviewees, includingSPROF_13, agreed that giving women little ***credit for achievements*** amounts to an organisational barrier to leadership:

> *At the beginning of their careers, women and men are treated equally in terms of position and salary, but at higher levels women with same qualifications may not get the same position and portfolio.*

Many participants expressed the view that women had to work harder to achieve the same professional growth as men and that this was difficult to justify, because the additional burden of familial responsibilities that women bear should mean that the requirements placed on them at work were discounted to some extent, rather than being stricter. Most other interviewees agreed that women in Saudi HEIs do not receive the same credit for their achievements as men.

Another organisational barrier to women's pursuit of leadership was identified as a ***lack of clear promotion criteria***, which HOD_20 saw as affecting both sexes:

> *We rarely have clearly defined organisational policies, even for men. ... If I want to rise to the top I don't know how to.*

Among other participants who agreed that a lack of clarity as to how people are promoted would tend to deprive women of their due promotion opportunities was SPROF_17:

> *Nothing is clear.... This is the problem. We don't know what path to take in order to get where we want to go. It's like telling me not to bother trying.*

Unclear promotion criteria can lead individuals to misdirect their efforts to achieve their professional goals. For example, if they knew that engaging in academic research and accumulating certifications and qualifications might boost their chances of reaching the top positions, then they would be likely to invest their efforts towards these activities. Conversely, not knowing what criteria their employers might use to assess their performance makes it difficult for them to align their efforts with their objectives.

Interviewees expressed ***unhappiness*** over a related barrier to leadership, in the form of a ***stricter and biased policy on promoting women***. Several highlighted this by noting that qualification criteria for promotion were much lower for men than for women, so that women had to work harder in order to advance their careers. One possible reason for this was suggested by HOD_15:

> *There are not enough openings for women at the top, so there could be deliberate attempts to slow down their progression. You don't want a large number of candidates and no positions for them.*

DCP_18 supported this argument:

> *Men get better promotions with less effort, while women have to work extra hard to get promoted, even in terms of number of years of experience. I think more positions are created for men than women.*

She raised a valid point: that the relatively large proportion of females in Saudi higher education, both students and staff, is not reflected in the number of top positions being offered to them. Thus, despite comprising around half of the workforce in the education sector, women are inadequately represented at the top levels (Albaqami, 2016). This affects the policies formulated by top management for the benefit of female employees (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

Stricter promotion criteria for women means that in comparison to men, they must put in more effort and be better qualified in order to reach the same position and that despite being at par with men in ability, women have fewer leadership opportunities (Al Ghamdi, 2016). The main problem, however, is not difficulty in promotion, but rather an insufficient number of opportunities available, so that women spend considerably more time in any one position than men do (AlDoubi, 2014). DOF_24 summed this up very well:

> *Interestingly, we have wage equality, so men and women in the same position will receive exactly the same salary. However, it is more difficult for women to get promoted and this happens as soon as they start working. Men get promotions easier than women.*

Participants complained that women suffered not only from lack of recognition and growth opportunities, but also from the absence of one of the most critical components of top-level promotions, i.e. connections.HOD_20 and DOF_29 were two of those citing ***lack of connections with top-level decision makers*** as an organisational barrier:

> *You know most of the top-level appointments are made through connections.*
>
> *There is a strong trend of appointing outsiders with connections as heads. Women do not have these connections, so they have little chance of getting to the top.*

Some other interviewees suggested that women often do not have the necessary connections because they do not engage with influential people, so in most cases any influential support they do receive comes from male members of their immediate family such as their father, brothers or husband. The consequence is that while women's experience and ability can often take them to positions close to the top level, they will find it difficult to break through the glass ceiling.

One of the participants who disagreed that connections constitute a serious issue was DOA_31:

> *I don't think you need connections to get to the top. I mean, not all the women who are successful at work are there because of their connections... You need to prove yourself and I agree that women do not get enough opportunities to prove themselves.*

This interviewee argued that the real problem for women was lack of opportunity rather than connections, which according to her are not enough on their own to help people in rising to the top. A parallel argument is that it would be unlikely that none of the women seeking top-level leadership lacked the necessary connections; therefore, if this were truly a decisive barrier, there would have been at least a few well connected women who succeeded in rising to the top.

Overall, the interview responses indicate that while connections may not explicitly assist in reaching higher positions, they may provide certain privileges which individuals can use to their advantage. For example, one of the participants, who wanted anonymity for this comment, suggested that people with connections would find it much easier to obtain funding for activities such as attending conferences. In other words, connections may be seen as creating better opportunities to gain the credentials for leadership positions. However, this may be a minor contributing factor in deciding leadership positions for women, since despite some having support, there are very few instances of women rising to the top (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

The inadequacy of top-level connections can be seen as a barrier to women's rise to leadership arising from the weakness of their relations with those above them in seniority; for many, it was mirrored by their perception of the ***disfavouring and uncooperative behaviour of their peers and subordinates***. Some interviewees, includingDOF_26, ascribed this to professional and personal jealousy:

> *There is a lot of jealousy and women colleagues will sometimes try to prevent you from rising.*

Others, supporting the view that ***jealousy*** is often a barrier for women at work, stated that it often affects their willingness to cooperate, thus impairing their ability not only to grow but also to contribute to the growth of others. This in turn fosters distrust and limits opportunities for cooperation. For example, DOF_29 and HOD_21 commented:

> *You will see many women trying to publish their work but they don't disclose it to others including their peers... But we don't have that kind of trust. We think the other person is jealous of us and may do us some harm.*

There is definitely some jealousy. Not in everyone but in many of us. This affects cooperation on many issues. The main thing is that because of this jealousy we don't share many things with our colleagues.

Growth and development in the academic community require cooperation among academics and researchers, which professional jealousy impedes. It is, however, difficult to determine whether this is a barrier to leadership specific to women, because men may also exhibit professional jealousy. It is also possible that the jealousy complained of by participants may be purely perceptual rather than factual, based on their personal experience and not on direct evidence of the motivations of others. Furthermore, not all interviewees agreed that colleagues behaved badly and uncooperatively; indeed, some reported receiving good support at work. HOD_23 was one of these:

It is really good to know that you have so many people around you whom you can rely on. There is so much we share and discuss and it feels so good to be like in a sea of knowledge.

SLEC_17 also implied that there was no issue of professional jealousy in Saudi HEIs:

In universities it is quite good for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. I have worked on two papers with my colleagues and now I am working with another one. We try to work with each other and help.

Some participants also highlighted a ***lack of authoritative power*** as one of the key organisational barriers affecting women's progression to leadership. They suggested that women often make only low-level decisions, not having the authority to make major ones. A perception that their decisions can easily be disputed and overturned was said to affect women's confidence and their willingness to take meaningful decisions. DOF_26 voiced this hesitancy:

It is not easy as a woman to make strong decisions, especially those which may be considered disruptive.

This indicates that women, even those in senior positions, may be deprived of opportunities to gain and demonstrate leadership skills. This could affect their motivation, as they may consider their leadership status to be merely symbolic. Two statements, by SLEC_17 and HOD_23, illustrate this reduced authority for women:

The problem is that women cannot be too visionary because they are limited in what they can or cannot do. They need to get permission for most high-level decisions and also the credit for decisions goes to external leaders, not to the internal ones.

The main issue we face is in budget allocation. We are given a budget and told what we have to do with it. We cannot make that decision ourselves... We do not have the kind of control that we would like.

Several participants considered women to be unduly restricted by the difficulty of managing heavy ***workload and burdensome administrative tasks***, as HOA_21 said:

I have noticed that more administrative responsibilities are given to women than men. We already have families to take care of, so it becomes even more difficult.

This may lead to a lack of motivation to seek leadership opportunities among Saudi women, who themselves sometimes seek positions which allow them to avoid such tasks, as exemplified by SPROF_17:

As a professor I feel I have a better work-life balance than an administrator. Professors teach in a few lectures and are not constantly working the whole day. I mean physically. Administrators have to work from start to end.

This comment suggests that some women may deliberately seek positions which provide them with a better work-life balance, even if this requires them to compromise on some professional benefits. The problem, however, is with those women who may not seek such a trade-off yet may be forced into accepting it because access to professional growth is closed to them. This was clearly evident from the comments of DOA_31, who disagreed that workload and burdensome administrative tasks constituted barriers to leadership:

I don't think workload is an issue. I mean, if someone wants to get to the top I'm sure they know what it involves. I am a dean and I know how much effort it takes to manage a university. Now this is not a job for everyone, only those who are committed to their work. ...Leadership comes with few privileges and many responsibilities.

A number of interview responses highlighted a feeling among women of having a very ***poor work-life balance*** as compared to men. HOD_23, for example complained:

Men can come home when they want and they do not have to do anything after that... You think a woman can do this? We have to play the double role of professional and homemaker. It's really tough on women.

A number of participants, includingSPROF_13, identified poor work-life balance as one of the reasons why women either do not seek top positions or are not considered for them:

I have a friend who was considered for the position of dean, but her family refused to back her because they thought she would have no time for them... In some cases families or husbands try to restrict women because they think that this will affect their ability to play their family role.

These comments indicate that poor work-life balance may affect Saudi women's ability and motivation to seek leadership positions. Difficulty in balancing work and home life is quite common in Saudi Arabia, where women are traditionally considered to be suited for domestic duties rather than professional roles, so that even when they do have a professional role they are expected to prioritise their family responsibilities (Al Ghamdi, 2016). DOF_24 suggested how this situation could be improved:

I think they should know better and give women a better working environment to ensure they can play their family role as well... I think things would be different if we had women leaders, because they would understand.

This response is consistent with many others discussed in this section, expressing the view that having a woman as leader is useful because she will be better able to understand the various challenges that female staff and students face. Helping women to maintain a better work-life balance offers the possibility of improving both their ability and motivation to lead. Conversely, a poor work-life balance is challenging for women because it exacerbates other problems such as social and family pressures, making them more likely to abandon their pursuit of top positions (Al Ghamdi, 2016). In some cases, women feel ***pressure from society*** to not be ambitious, as most people assume that professional success comes at the cost of family life. This is beginning to change, however, as more families become comfortable with the idea of working women (Al Ghamdi, 2016).

Many interviewees indicated that even in cases where women face no familial pressure, they may feel ***guilty*** about the possibility that they are ignoring their family for their

professional aspirations. Participants indicated that the social upbringing of Saudi women is such that they consider it their primary duty to be good mothers and wives, arousing ***guilt*** if they do not fulfil this expectation of their family members. In this respect, work-life balance problems may be more perceptual than factual, as is evident from the fact that not all interviewees agreed that a poor work-life balance was a barrier to them seeking leadership opportunities. HOD_15 and DOF_24 provided examples of this contrary opinion:

> *It's the nature of the job. It's not that women are forced to do this. It's the nature of the leader's job that you have to do everything. So a busy life comes with a lot of benefits as well, like a high salary.*
>
> *They have to look at everything, constantly thinking about how to improve things. Even when they are not at work, good leaders will still keep thinking about their organisation. If you want to be a leader you should be prepared for this.*

Thus, even the participants who opposed the view that a poor work-life balance bars women from leadership did so not on the grounds that the phenomenon did not exist, but rather that it should be seen as part of a leader's job for which anyone seeking to get to the top should be prepared. The barrier, in other words, may be one of motivation, in that it is the fear of not being able to manage their work-life balance that deters some women from seeking to rise to the top.

SPROF_20 was one of a number of interviewees who raised a related aspect of motivation, suggesting that potential candidates for top positions were often deterred by the extent of the ***workload and responsibilities***:

> *We know that getting a top position is even more difficult for work-life balance. I can take time off now, but if I was a senior person I'd have tons of responsibilities. I'd have to stay longer, solve more problems and this would bring a lot of headaches. Why would I want to put up with this if I couldn't get to the top position?*

If this is true, it indicates that some women may deliberately slow down their progression in order to minimise their workload and responsibilities, which can be interpreted as a lack of motivation to lead. However, it also suggests that if the glass ceiling were removed, these individuals might feel motivated to seek top opportunities.

Organisational barriers therefore affect not only women's perceptions of their ability to reach the top but also their desire and motivation to do so; many women, realising the difficulties involved or the very low probability of success in this endeavour, will tend to divert their attention and focus towards other aspects of life. This concept is widely known as 'opportunity cost', whereby individuals seek to divert their efforts towards objectives which are comparatively more satisfying to them.

The final organisational barrier cited as restricting leadership opportunities for women was the preference in Saudi Arabia for a ***masculine management style***. Saudi society is highly masculine as per the Hofstede cultural index. In such a culture, feminine leadership traits are not highly prized. For example, conflicts are often resolved by force in masculine societies, whereas in feminine cultures they are addressed through negotiation (de Mooij, 2010). The high-power distance index of Saudi culture also means that leaders must be authoritative; but women, as DOF_26 commented,

> *…cannot be authoritative. It's difficult for us because we have not been raised that way. In organisations you need someone with power as a leader.*

The problem, according to HOD_23,

> *… is that women are not considered capable of leading because of their gentle caring nature. Organisations need tough and strong leaders. Women are not strong and they would definitely not argue or try to be bossy.*

These responses indicate that women may lack the ability to lead in Saudi HEIs. However, not all interviewees agreed that a masculine leadership style is the only one suitable for this environment. While agreeing that women's feminine and caring style contrasts with men's masculine, authoritative one, HOD_23 rhetorically presented the case for female leaders:

> *Why do we need bosses who will not listen to anyone or be very strict and detached?*

Women are widely considered to practice a more inclusive and participative management style, which may be more suitable for academic institutions. Values such as efficiency and competitiveness are understandably given precedence in business-oriented organisations, while cooperation and collaboration are more appropriate in educational institutions (Al

Ghamdi, 2016); significantly, these values are generally considered characteristic of a feminist leadership approach (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

6.4.2 Cultural barriers

The existence of cultural barriers is one of the factors most commonly cited as underpinning the glass ceiling in Saudi Arabia (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Table 42 lists a number of cultural barriers that interviewees identified as limiting their ability to reach top positions.

Table 42 List of perceived cultural barriers that may affect Saudi women's rise to leadership in HEIs

Cultural barrier	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/ not mentioned
Negative perceptions of women's leadership	8	1	6
Negative perceptions of female leaders	13	0	2
Lack of freedom	11	1	3
Religious surveillance	5	0	10
Lack of family support	8	3	4
Lack of peer support/professional jealousy	6	1	8
Tribal traditions	15	0	0
Family norms	13	0	2

Around half of the participants mentioned ***negative perceptions of women's leadership***, reporting the impression that in Saudi society, women are not usually considered to be good leaders and decision makers. In other words, at a general level, Saudi society does not demonstrate its trust in women's ability to lead and such trust may indeed be lacking. These responses byDCP_18 and SLEC_17 illustrate this view:

> *There is a lot of stereotyping of women as poor decision makers... Over time, it builds into a perception and our mindset. Generally speaking, women's leadership and decision-making powers are not trusted.*
>
> *When women make bad decisions they are constantly reminded about their poor decision making and how they should always consult a man before deciding anything of significance. So basically, we have this perception that women as leaders cannot perform well.*

Some interviewees conceded that there may be some truth in these negative perceptions, but DOA_31, for example, argued that if so, it is not because they lack natural capabilities but because they are deprived of leadership opportunities and therefore do not get the chance to develop these skills:

> *Decision making is a complex science. You need to consider a lot of factors, the pros and cons, before you make a decision. Decision making has to be learnt through practice. The problem is that in our society women are not allowed to make decisions on matters of significance. We have gradually taken away that decision-making skill from women.*

This is quite an interesting remark, because it highlights how leadership abilities can be developed as well as eroded over time. It suggests that participants felt that Saudi women's professional leadership qualities had been eroded by persistently poor socio-cultural practices whereby women were given little opportunity to participate in leadership activities. The implication is that in order to develop good leadership skills in women, a change in cultural mindset is required.

In parallel to these negative perceptions of women's leadership style, all but two of the interviewees referred to ***negative perceptions of female leaders*** themselves as a cultural barrier to leadership. The suggestion was that women who seek leadership positions are often seen negatively by other members of society, leading to some decline in their motivation to lead. According toSPROF_20 and others, women who work towards achieving leadership positions may be seen as immoral, pursuing professional success at the cost of their moral responsibility to look after the family:

> *I have often heard people talking negatively about professionally successful women, almost as if it is wrong or immoral to be professionally successful. Such negativity is not only seen in outsiders but often within the family as well.*

HOD_33 offered an explanation related more to psychology than to morality:

> *The biggest barrier is our cultural mindset, which more or less does not accept women leaders. We are not used to seeing women leaders. It is not easy to accept.*

In the same vein, she added:

> *As university leaders you have to attend meetings with senior education ministry officials... Women themselves lack confidence and are reluctant to discuss things with unrelated men, so how would they interact with a group of such men to discuss these matters?*

DCP_18 was among those contrasting the expectation that men should strive to become professionally successful with the pressure that women tend to face to give up their professional ambitions in order to focus more on the family:

> *Social pressure on men is in the opposite direction, which is to get higher ranking positions at work and do more work and not sit at home... It's the opposite for most women.*

This culturally based gender dichotomy is particularly interesting in light of the broadly positive perception of women's education in Saudi Arabia. Most families agree that educated women can be better mothers and this is the reason why Saudi Arabia has a very high literacy rate, with women even outnumbering men in university education (Al Ghamdi, 2016). Yet, despite being so open about their education, Saudi society seems closed and apprehensive about women's employment, especially in leadership positions (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). DOF_26 offered this explanation:

> *We want our women to be educated but not necessary working. I think this is because in education they can still be gender segregated, but in work it's not easy to gender segregate.*

DOF_29 saw the problem as being one of a cultural mindset in which women are dependent and not to be depended upon:

> *We have this culture where women are expected to depend on men and be thankful. We are not yet ready to accept that men can sometimes depend on women*.

In her opinion, the appointment of women leaders would challenge the long-held patriarchal model of society, which is also considered a moral and ethical model, as it is arbitrarily linked to Sharia, even though there is nothing to justify this association.

However, not all interviewees agreed that society holds negative views of women leaders. HOD_23 rejected this negative perception in these words:

I think people in Saudi admire women leaders because there are so few. I think it's a wrong perception. As far as I know, people respect women who are successful. Especially women have a lot of respect for women leaders.

When asked for examples, she referred to social media celebrities who have a large following among Saudi youth. Indeed, such role models are admired and often followed by individuals. The problem, however, is that there are not enough women leaders in Saudi Arabia to validate this participant's views. Moreover, social media celebrities are not the same as organisational leaders, especially those in educational institutions. The process of accession to top positions in the two cases is completely different and the stay at the top may also vary. Having female celebrities, therefore, cannot be considered akin to having women leaders in educational institutions. It is notable, for example, that female social media celebrities have been common in Saudi Arabia for almost a decade, but this has not coincided within any improvement in women's professional status in higher education.

Another key cultural issue which has been raised in many contexts in Saudi Arabia is ***lack of freedom*** for women, which may significantly affect both motivation and opportunities to lead. According to the interviewees, women may be granted a great deal of freedom in certain domains, but not when it comes to matters of significance. For example, HOD_20 was typical of a majority whose replies suggested that when it came to making career choices, they always had to keep others in mind, even if they had really good opportunities:

It's always the women who have to compromise. We don't have freedom to do things. In women's lives this freedom is generally lacking, so we are not used to independent decision making.

DOA_31 also commented on the consequences of restricted freedom:

Freedom for women is an issue in our day-to-day lives... I think this has become a norm in our society, that irrespective of who is in the team, the team leaders will always be men.

Most of the interviewees agreed that in terms of freedom, there remained much to be done to improve the situation. For example, women have only recently been allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia and they still require permission from men before engaging in basic activities such as travelling. The problem is that this lack of freedom may permeate into

the minds of individual women, leading them to assume their natural role in society to be that of followers (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

Saudi Arabia is essentially composed of several tribes which came together under the rule of the Al Saud family. One of the key aspects of this integration was the guarantee that the tribes would be able to continue to observe their diverse traditions. The problem with this arrangement, which has never been revoked (Al Ghamdi, 2016), is that these ***tribal traditions,*** originally adopted under very different historical circumstances, are less appropriate to modern conditions. Their effect on the lives of women is not only direct but also operates by limiting the government's capacity for reforms (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017), as HOD_15 explained:

> *One of the reasons you have not witnessed sweeping changes in Saudi Arabia is that the culture relies excessively on our tribal traditions. In Saudi we have this tradition where our words are taken as honour, so we will respect these at any cost. So unless there is consensus among all, it is difficult to push through reforms.*

One of the tribal traditions mentioned by many women is *mehram*, a practice by which females require the written permission of their legal male guardian for many activities. According to the interviewees, this tribal practice has no reference to Shariah but is still practiced by law, even though this may not be relevant today. Such traditions may restrict women's ability to pursue opportunities to grow professionally. As noted earlier, women's mindset is likely as a consequence to be marked by a subservient attitude. SPROF_13 put it this way:

> *Our cultural foundation is grounded in the tribal system which Saudi Arabia emerged from. It is not easy for anyone to look beyond those cultural traditions because we have learnt to obey the system. ... In modern times such practices should have become obsolete, but they are enshrined in Saudi law.*

One of the cultural barriers most commonly cited by participants was that of ***family norms and responsibilities.*** In Saudi society, women are considered suited to domestic roles and are expected to compromise their professional ambitions in order to serve their families, as described by SPROF_20:

When babies are born, mothers in Saudi Arabia take quite a long break or sometimes stop working. ... Women who try to get back to work often face social pressure to quit work and look after the family.

Examples were discussed in Section 6.4.1 of women lacking support at the organisational level. Similarly, a number of interviewees indicated that ***lack of family support*** affects women quite seriously. DOF_26 was one of those describing family pressures to prioritise domestic responsibilities over leadership opportunities as a key stumbling block:

We are always told that family comes first. So even when we are making professional decisions we are thinking about the family. This is a big issue. I have been told not to aspire too much. I have faced this.

Similar views were expressed by DOA_31, HOA_21, HOD_23, SPROF_17 and SPROF_20:

I think it is about a culture which deliberately restricted women in the professional environment to ensure there are enough women to play family roles. We are too used to having a woman as mother or wife to take care of the house and its members.

For women, it is often assumed that professional success is at the cost of family responsibilities. Successful women are often criticised for ignoring their family's needs... It's as if we were trying to undermine successful women's achievement.

I haven't seen enough parents talking to their daughters about what they want to be in life; about their career plans and so on, like I have for boys. In fact, I've seen parents being overly concerned about boys 'careers but showing very little concern for the careers of women.

In Saudi I believe that behind all successful women there is a man. Our success is because of great men behind us who push us to be successful... It's embarrassing for Saudi men when the woman is more successful than them.

It's all cultural. We still knowingly or unknowingly groom girls to become good mothers and wives but not good professionals.

These contributions reflect interviewees' belief that stereotyping of women's role in society is one of the reasons why some women do not even dream of going to the top, i.e.

they lack the motivation to succeed professionally. However, there may be a positive change in society in this respect. Some participants denied that women suffer from a lack of family support. Some ***welcomed changing attitudes*** whereby society is gradually opening up towards giving women a greater stake in the workforce, especially with more families agreeing to women working. One such interviewee was DCP_18:

> *Things have changed so much from the past. In the old days most husbands preferred their wives not to work, but now I see a lot of families where men prefer working women and helping them.*

Again, there were others who broadly agreed, with supporting comments coming from HOD_33, SLEC_17 and SPROF_17:

> *I think most families now accept and to great extent prefer working women. I think this is because people have started to believe that an educated working woman will be able to raise and educate her children better.*
>
> *It is only in recent times that attitudes have started to change, with people now looking to make their daughters professionals. Even men are looking for professional wives because they can support their families economically. I think attitudes are changing, but I am not sure if this would affect their view about seeing women at top.*
>
> *You can see how many women are now going abroad to achieve higher qualifications such as masters and PhDs. That means they have support from their family members ...so attitudes are definitely changing.*

This is consistent with the assertion of Al Ghamdi (2016) that while there has historically been some family resistance to women working, attitudes have begun to change more recently, with more men accepting the economic role of women. The plausible explanation offered by DOF_24 relates to the exposure to the wider world that Saudi society has experienced in recent times:

> *A lot of young people are well exposed to the outside world now. Many of us got our education in Western countries. We've travelled abroad and we see the international media through the internet and everything. This is leading to a bridging of the gap.*

In her opinion, the underrepresentation of women in the workforce was never a restriction imposed by the government but rather a cultural issue, with families and society influencing women's career choices. She was therefore hopeful that the cultural changes happening in Saudi Arabia would be accompanied by changing social attitudes and perceptions, consequently easing the pressure on women.

6.4.3 Personal barriers

In addition to cultural and organisational barriers, participants were asked to highlight the key personal barriers affecting women's ability to reach the top in Saudi HEIs. Their responses are summarised in Table 43.

Table 43 List of perceived personal barriers that may affect Saudi women's rise to leadership in HEIs

Personal barriers	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/ not mentioned
Lacking the confidence to lead	11	2	2
Lacking the motivation to lead	9	4	2
Lack of interest in leading	7	2	6
Lack of managerial training and experience	13	0	2
Lacking the capability to lead	6	7	0

Among the personal barriers highlighted by the largest numbers of interviewees was ***lacking the confidence to lead***. They used words such as 'fear', 'reluctance' and 'hesitation', suggesting that years of playing subservient roles to males had led Saudi women to lose the confidence to lead. According to this account, some women are reluctant to seek top leadership because they fear that it will affect their lives significantly and they may not be able to handle the consequences. In DCP_18's opinion,

> *I think it is mainly internal factors. Maybe family responsibilities, maybe a lack of confidence or even reluctance to take responsibility for decisions. As a leader you are in the limelight and very few Saudi women like being in the limelight, at least in a public context.*

SPROF_17 and HOD_23 also both referred directly to a lack of confidence:

Most women have no self-confidence. They have little faith in their skills and knowledge, especially when it comes to leading a team including men. They cannot impose their leadership ... You need someone who has a lot of confidence, knowledge, skills and competencies for leadership.

Women definitely have confidence issues... There is a fear of loss, shame or fear of making the wrong decision.

Some women, as HOD_15 explained, ***fear*** leadership because they do not know what it will involve:

Sometimes unconsciously, they may be uncertain, hesitant, and maybe afraid of failure. …Women are not sure… Men have always done these things faster and men show more courage than women.

Some respondents agreed that women may ***not*** be ***as strong*** in terms of leading, but argued that this was mainly because of the cultural expectation that they would play subservient roles. HOD_15 commented:

I think it's a cultural thing. Women are taught to rely on men for most big decisions and then they become used to this.

Furthermore, according to some interviewees, women feel ***safer*** in their roles as academics, as they are confident that they can do this well, but they may not have the same level of confidence when it comes to leadership roles. There was broad agreement that women are likely to be less confident because they have not yet led professional organisations at the top level. Some women ***fear*** failure because of their relative lack of experience of leadership roles, as DOA_31 intimated:

At lower positions your decisions are approved by the top management, so there is some scrutiny and you don't fear making that decision, because it's top management's job to scrutinise it. As a top manager, you become accountable for everything.

In her opinion, the lack of leadership experience means that the fear of adverse outcomes and its consequences is even higher among women.

DOF_29 commented on the distinction between determination and stubbornness:

Women may not have the kind of self-confidence that you need for being a leader. You need to be very strong personality. You need determination, but for some people determination is the same as stubbornness. Women do not play assertive, confident roles.

HOD_33 and HOA_21 rejected the majority opinion that women lack the confidence to lead:

It is definitely not true that women lack confidence. If they did then we would not have female deans and other staff. Are you telling me that if we decide to promote women they will refuse?

Not everyone is a leader, so you cannot generalise that they have no confidence. Those women who like to lead will definitely have the confidence.

A few others did not refer directly to lack of confidence but their responses, such as this from HOD_21, hinted at certain issues causing a loss of confidence:

Women may decide not to take additional responsibilities due to fear that they may fail or because of taking time off work at critical times in their careers... They see other women facing these problems and they think they will face the same.

In other words, the issue is not one of confidence. DOF_26 suggested another alternative:

I don't think it's a confidence issue. It's more about not knowing what it will involve. You are responsible for so many things and if you don't know what it will involve, there could be some apprehension, but that will be true for everyone, men or women.

The problem may be that when women fail in professional decision making, their failure is often attributed to them being women, while for men it is considered an occasional human error. This argument was exemplified by SPROF_17:

You know how women drivers are often accused of not knowing how to drive because they are women, while men drivers are simply called careless. We don't generalise issues in men but we do in women.

Another personal barrier highlighted by the interviewees was ***lacking the motivation to lead***. Many suggested that women tend not to be too competitive, probably because they

have been groomed to be more accommodating since childhood and therefore do not see themselves as leaders. Two such explanations were offered by DOF_29 and HOA_21:

> *I don't think they feel like leading, probably because they don't know how to, or perhaps they think it's too much of an effort.*
>
> *I don't think women feel like leading. I think they are too satisfied with their lives and are happy to do whatever little they have to do. They don't see it as particularly rewarding for them, especially considering how much work they will have to do to get it. There's simply no motivation.*

Some others, including DCP_18, while accepting that women are less likely to pursue leadership opportunities, disagreed that this was because of an inherent lack of motivation:

> *We are only motivated for what we can realistically achieve. Now if I have to forget about everything and focus on just one thing in my life ... The problem is that things are really difficult for women and that people think is there is no motivation.*

This account suggests that some women are ***motivated***, but that their motivation is affected by their realistic view of the situation, whereby they may assume that their efforts will only take them to a certain level but not to the top.

Two others who rejected the notion of a lack of motivation to lead among women were HOA_21 and HOD_33:

> *Not among those who want to lead. You cannot generalise about leadership, that every man and woman can or will be a leader. So for women who see themselves as leaders, there is no lack of motivation.*
>
> *Women are very motivated to compete and lead. I can see it in them. Why do you think so many women go on to acquire higher qualifications and try to get on? We have many women working in senior positions and many others fighting hard to get there. Is that not a sign of motivation?*

The participants were thus divided on whether women are motivated to lead or not. On closer inspection, it seems that it was those in junior positions who were more likely to

agree that women often lack the motivation to lead, whereas those in more senior positions tended to disagree with this generalisation.

A closely related factor cited by some interviewees as a personal barrier was ***lack of interest in leading***. SPROF_13 and DOF_26 were among those who felt that many women are simply not interested in leading:

> *A personal reluctance to lead could be the most significant barrier. Not many women are prepared to lead. I know certain faculty members who have amazing experience and are very well known in academic circles, but they are too busy building their academic profiles.*
>
> *I think many women are simply not interested because they don't want to be overburdened with work. They don't see it as particularly rewarding either, considering the fact that as a leader they would have no time for their personal lives.*

Thus, many interviewees indicated that women make a personal choice regarding their work-life balance. They tend to forego leadership opportunities because accepting them would require them to ignore their family life and would leave no time for personal relaxation. This was evident in the words of HOD_15 and SLEC_17:

> *Leadership means a lot of hard work. It's not simply a 9-to-5 job and you are responsible for so many things. I don't think most women are interested in such opportunities. The biggest problem for them is probably the amount of travelling and meetings this would involve.*
>
> *Most women I know are worried about their families. … It's a very difficult life for women. This is where I think we need women leaders, because they can better understand the challenges that female employees face and prepare policies to help them overcome those challenges.*

Lack of interest could also be ascribed to anticipation of social and familial pressures. ***Societal pressure*** was cited by many participants as one of the key pressures on them at all stages of their lives, especially when reaching towards the top, because of how much busier they would then be. Some interviewees suggested that even when women achieve a good balance between their family and professional lives, their families tend to treat them as irresponsible mothers, leading to a sense of ***guilt***. It is as if society assumes that a

professional woman cannot pay sufficient attention to her family. The effects of these familial and social forces were alluded to by SPROF_17, HOD_21, HOD_23 and DOF_29:

> *I think women try not to be leaders because they fear that their families will oppose them being busy all the time. Leaders are sometimes kept busy all evening, attending meetings and so on. How will they manage this? Money is not the only thing in life.*
>
> *Families impose restrictions and sometimes the women impose restrictions on themselves, keeping in mind that this is their responsibility... After all, we are made to believe that earning a living is the responsibility of men and not women.*
>
> *It's not easy for a mother to leave her child in the care of a maid and be worried about it all day.*
>
> *To be honest, if you know our society it's not easy for someone to ignore everyone and everything and live normally. It's not easy to ignore. But the same goes for men. They also have social pressures and yet they manage. It's because they know that in this society people will respect them only if they are professionally successful.*

There was almost complete consensus that ***lack of managerial training and experience*** was a key personal barrier. Interviewees including HOD_21 suggested that a lack of professional training leaves women tending to feel underprepared to lead:

> *I don't think most women have enough experience or knowledge of leading. They tend to do things by rule, but decision making is too complicated for them and involves taking everything into consideration. So many problems, and you have to find solutions!*

Some other interviewees suggested that insufficient training caused them to lack the confidence to lead. According to DOA_31, for example, females have little experience of what is involved in decision making and how to ensure accountability.

> *They are probably not confident or trained enough to make decisions and be accountable.*

Thus, most of the participants suggested that poor leadership training opportunities for women is one of the reasons why they lack the skills to lead. Conversely, providing

adequate training would not only expose them to appropriate leadership practices but would also help them to identify the areas they needed to work on. There was a general belief that leadership development cannot be done solely by the individual or by the organisation; rather, it must be a joint enterprise, with the organisation providing the opportunities to develop the leadership skills and capabilities of individual women, who, for their part, should maximise their own leadership development through effective and strategic use of these opportunities.

A narrow majority of interviewees disagreed that women ***lack the capability to lead***. Indeed, some even stated that they felt offended by the question itself, arguing that on the contrary, women aspire to lead and that they have much to contribute through their different leadership style. DOA_31 made this assertion:

> *Women can be amazing leaders if they are given opportunities. But remember, a leader should be free to lead, choose her own kind of leadership and make her own decisions.*

The implication of this comment is that women leaders are often not allowed free rein to make their own decisions. Any supposed lack of capability to lead, according to this view, reflects the restrictions imposed on women leaders in terms of decision making.

DOF_24 also rejected the idea that women are incapable of leading:

> *There is one problem. Instead of saying that women lack the ability to lead I would say that most people lack the ability to lead. Probably only 1% of us have what it takes to be a leader. That's why we have so few leaders and so many followers.*

In other words, she believed that being capable or incapable of leadership is not a gender-specific trait. Among men and women alike, there are those few who are able to lead and the rest who lack this capability.

Other interviewees did, however, recognise an overall difference in leadership capability between women and men. SLEC_17 was one who agreed that women may lack the capability to lead:

> *The problem is that for centuries Saudi women have not been given the opportunity to lead, so they do indeed lack the skills needed to lead. That's the way it is.*

Leadership is all about experience, so if you don't have experience you don't know how to lead.

In this participant's opinion, Saudi women may lack the capability to lead at present, but two things should be noted. First, if they lack this ability it is only because they feel that they have not been given the opportunity to learn how to lead. Second, the fact that women lack the capability to lead does not mean that they cannot learn how to do so. All that is required is for them to be given sufficient opportunities to lead and to learn.

Having elicited interviewees' opinions regarding the various barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia, the researcher moved the focus of the discussion to the likely impact of the Vision 2030 project.

6.5 Impact of Saudi Vision 2030

One of the main objectives of the qualitative part of this research was to investigate the likely effects of Saudi Vision 2030 on the barriers to leadership that Saudi women face. Few past studies have addressed this matter, because the government's development plan was not announced until April 2016. Doing so here thus constitutes one of the key contributions of this research.

Participants were first asked whether they believed that Vision 2030 would bring changes in the current situation of women's leadership in Saudi HEIs and their responses indicated a general optimism regarding such changes. Eleven of the 15 interviewees sounded ***optimistic*** about Vision 2030 and suggested that it was likely to have a profound and positive impact on women's accession to leadership. Among these, seven women agreed that the changes which had occurred thus far were not in themselves sufficient, but they indicated that they saw them as positive signs of things to come. The other four optimistic participants predicted that the reforms introduced would have a domino effect, causing widespread changes throughout the country.

Among the remaining interviewees, who were not convinced of the effectiveness of the Vision 2030 reforms, three suggested that the current level of change was insufficient and argued that much more needed to be done to resolve the situation, while one believed

that nothing had been achieved. Despite these criticisms, interviewees seemed ***happy*** overall with the changes introduced by the government, especially in face of the resistance that these much-needed reforms could be expected to provoke.

Participants also felt that women in Saudi Arabia seemed ***motivated*** by the announcement of the reforms. DOF_29 and SPROF_17 both made positive comments regarding the effectiveness of Vision 2030:

> *Things are changing. I can see not small but dramatic changes. I had not imagined some of these things that are happening and honestly it shouldn't shock us.*
>
> *I'm very excited and I'm not the only one. All the women I speak to seem to be quite excited. Now we talk about what other employment sectors might open, what new courses might be introduced.*

HOD_33 reflected a general opinion that Vision 2030 was likely to open up more leadership opportunities for Saudi women:

> *Vision 2030 puts women in the spotlight. I think you will very soon see many high profile positions being allocated to women leaders.*

Some interviewees exhibited ***excitement*** at the appointment of the first woman ambassador, arguing that such high profile appointments were likely to boost the image and morale of women in SA. SLEC_17 was one of these:

> *I think this Vision 2030 plan has done something amazing. It has changed people's opinion about women's role. People are now more willing to see women driving and working and everything.*

Changes such as these are likely to boost leadership opportunities for women, because they will expose Saudi society to the capabilities of women and may reduce the perception of their dependence on men. SLEC_17 elaborated on how these changes were likely to affect women culturally:

> *We have more presence in society now. Women have a public life and with that will come public image. There's greater participation of women in light of Vision 2030 and Princess Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud being the first Saudi ambassador to the USA, that's absolutely amazing.*

Indeed, the appointment of the first female ambassador is already being promoted as an important development in Saudi Arabia and often cited by the government in support of its commitment to empowering women. Interviewees also seemed to believe that this would lead to more leadership opportunities for women in the Kingdom. But not all were completely convinced that Vision 2030 would have the desired impact on women's leadership. For example, HOD_20 was cautious in her assessment:

> *Vision 2030 correctly identifies women as equal members of society. What we need to see is how this policy will be implemented by the government. Lots of implementation issues will occur, so how does the government overcome those?*

When invited to elaborate on her caution, she commented:

> *I think what Vision 2030 lacks is real programmes. The intent is there, but we don't know how the government is going to do what it has planned to do.*

HOD_15 went further, warning that Vision 2030 was unlikely to introduce any large-scale changes:

> *Societies around the world are male dominated and male focused, maybe particularly so in Saudi Arabia. What makes you think that when most other countries have failed to lift women out of dependency, Saudi will succeed?*

Talking specifically about the shortcomings of Vision 2030, she expressed the view that what was lacking was change within Saudi society and that government policies alone would be insufficient to bring about large-scale cultural change:

> *If you look at the content of Vision 2030 there is very little mention of women. I don't blame our government, because such changes need to come from society. Governments can make policies, but can they really implement a policy which is against our cultural beliefs?*

Indeed, some of the most critical barriers identified in this research are personal and cultural ones, which are difficult to overcome and will require long-term sustained efforts. The problem is that some of these changes may be seen as contrary to the principles of Islam and may thus face very stiff resistance.

However, all except one other interviewee appeared to believe more or less firmly that if implemented properly the Vision 2030 reforms had a strong possibility of bringing about the desired changes. The majority view was that when analysing the impact of the development plan, one must look not only at the text of the document but at the wider impact of whatever smaller changes result from its implementation.

SPROF_13 argued that with strong political will, the reforms would lead to meaningful long-term changes:

> *I think change is imminent. When the leadership decided they wanted to open up, allowing women to drive and so on, there was little or no voice of opposition. That's because people not only accepted the change, they were even probably surprised that it hadn't happened before.*

However, she accepted that the changes would not be implemented quickly:

> *I can understand that the government doesn't want the reforms to look too damaging for local culture and traditions, so these changes will take some time.*

According to the interviewees, the major impacts of Vision 2030 have been to provide more public space for women and to remove the perceptual barriers that constrained their social and professional lives. They voiced the belief that there was likely to be a consequent change in attitudes leading in turn to other constructive changes in the lives of women, but that any such changes would be gradual and become effective only if the reforms were sustained over a long period of time. There was a general expression of ***excitement*** at the opening up of several technology courses for women and confidence that women would relatively soon be at par with men by taking the opportunity to exhibit their capabilities.

One criticism of Vision 2030 was that the government should put more emphasis on women's empowerment. These contributions of SPROF_17 and SPROF_20 reflect a widespread view among interviewees that this was highly desirable:

> *If you carefully analyse it, there is not much text referring to women's programmes now, but the changes we are witnessing I believe will have huge implications for women's empowerment. It would be really helpful if the government could launch some programmes aimed directly at women's empowerment.*

Even if such programmes just show that this is one area that the government will focus on... just to give a hint to others and confidence to women. We can prepare for changes to come as long as we know what kind of changes will be coming.

DOF_29 suggested, however, that mere words would not help and that the government should prepare concrete and achievable plans for women:

I don't think anyone is expecting the government to change everything overnight. But we need to be sure that we are walking in the right direction. … The government should look at announcing and implementing achievable plans towards empowering women.

In light of the suggestion of the need for something more meaningful to be done in policy terms, the interview responses were analysed to identify any specific policy reforms that participants believed would help in overcoming the glass ceiling in Saudi HEIs.

6.6 Policy reform proposals

Several policy solutions were proposed. Interestingly, the interviewees appeared to believe that the most critical barriers that policymakers should seek to remove were the organisational ones. One reason for this was that while other barriers constrain women's personal choices, organisational barriers affect even those women who are otherwise ready to take on leadership roles.

Among the various reasons given why organisational barriers should be resolved first were these, summarised byHOD_21:

Remaining barriers will take time or are voluntary, so may or may not change with time. ...Cultural barriers will be sorted out with time. The problem with organisational barriers is that they affect women who are willing to give it their all.

She stressed that eliminating organisational barriers is essential to let women compete fairly and show whether they can prove themselves. Other participants argued that organisational barriers were entirely in the hands of policymakers and were therefore resolvable through good policymaking. On the other hand, they felt that other barriers were somehow linked to organisational ones and would take a long time to resolve. For

example, they argued that reducing cultural barriers would require changes in mindset, perspective and behaviour, which were unlikely to happen overnight. However, removing organisational barriers could trigger the process of sustained reforms. Interviewees hinted that changing the perceptions of women, such as making them more confident of their abilities or transforming their roles in the families and in society, would take time. By contrast, the process of removing organisational barriers should be fast-tracked, because it would be likely to improve their chances of success, as HOD_33 explained:

> *Right now people feel that women's career progression is not of much importance, because once they reach a certain level it is very difficult for them to go further. Once we can show that women can actually reach the top, then families will probably realise that they need to be more active professionally.*

In the opinion of DOF_29 and others, once the organisational barriers are removed, women will push through the glass ceiling and those who manage to do this will motivate others:

> *Every man or woman cannot be a leader. So only 5% of us are cut out for leadership. But they motivate other people to do their best. Even if organisational barriers are removed, not every woman will rise to leadership, as many will still continue to prefer family over work, but that will be a personal choice.*

In other words, removing organisational barriers will create a more level playing field, after which women will be able to make more independent choices regarding their professional ambitions.

Other proposed solutions included offering women more meaningful and practical training, if possible on the job. DCP_18 and DOF_26 were among those making this suggestion:

> *For us to be able to run institutions we definitely need additional training. We need to have programmes to build leadership skills and then use policies to give them more confidence. We need to prepare women for leadership roles and then give them equal opportunities to compete against men.*
>
> *Every woman should be made part of this, you know, about talent management. We should have talent management for women as well. They should be trained in*

the workplace during their career. Leadership is not only about the top levels. We have to play leadership roles even in small things we do.

Some women reported that they had received leadership training but did not find it worthwhile. HOA_21, for example, was highly critical:

I know our university has a huge budget for training and even sends people abroad for leadership training. But honestly speaking, I found the training not very useful. It was very theoretical and I forgot all about it just a week after. I mean, why do we have these training programmes just for the sake of it?

At least two other participants, from the same institution, also suggested that leadership training was provided merely to meet the budget and planning targets, but that the programmes were of little value. Other interviewees suggested that training provided by external organisations was often very generic and had a somewhat theoretical content. They also complained that the individuals delivering the training tended to have little knowledge of their culture, job profiles and various other relevant parameters. Such criticisms hint at wasted opportunities for women's development. Although it appears that funds are being spent, policymaking in this area is probably poor, because of a disconnect between top leadership and staff, leading to development opportunities being lost. This strengthens the case for appointing women leaders who are constantly in touch with the staff and students, allowing them to develop and implement policies that are more effective for females (Al Ghamdi, 2016).

According to another participant, efforts should be directed towards developing leadership skills and the confidence to lead:

There is no magic bullet. You need sustained efforts in this direction and this should begin with organisations giving their women employees everything equal and the same as the men, including development opportunities and opportunities to compete for everything

HOD_33 called for a sustained leadership development programme for women:

The work roles should be designed so that women get to develop their leadership skills. Peoples' perceptions will change with time, but what we need to make sure is that we have genuine female contenders for leadership positions. Get feedback

from women as to what kinds of training programmes are required. Allow them some autonomy and gradually give them leadership responsibilities.

These interviewees suggested that women should be given opportunities for leadership, help in decision making and both recognition and rewards for good decisions, all of which would boost their confidence in their own leadership competencies.

HOD_21 emphasised the overriding importance of mindset:

This is a matter of mindset more than anything else. Having a few at the top will contribute immensely toward changing the mindset and once it changes then people's overall behaviour and perceptions change... Having a few women leaders will definitely help, because then others will believe that it is possible.

SLEC_17 agreed on the need for role models:

It will boost their self-esteem and eliminate hesitation. This is essential, the self-belief that I can do this. Role models will definitely help.

DOA_31, however, warned against symbolism:

We must have genuine role models that are respected by both women and men. So this will give women both the confidence that they can be leaders and also opportunities, because even men will be willing to accept their leadership. It's essential for the whole of society to genuinely accept the role of women leaders.

In this dean's opinion, changes will not be brought about by mere symbolic gestures but rather by concrete steps. Together, the above responses suggest that it is critical to have role models but equally essential that their appointment should be based on merit. Thus, there must be a dual focus, first on developing women, then on removing the glass ceiling to allow them to reach the top. One of the weaknesses of existing policies in this regard is the appointment of already powerful women to senior positions, which creates the impression that only women with high-level connections can reach the top.

Finally, interviewees' responses reflected a belief that policy changes are also required to ensure that women's familial responsibilities are not an impediment to their success. For example, women in many Western counties are given extensive maternity leave with no professional repercussions. DOF_29 made this appeal:

We need policies where leadership development programmes are designed so that women are allowed to take a break without affecting their growth. Allow them to meet their domestic responsibilities and then come back and do well professionally... We have told them that they have to choose between being a mother and being a professional and this is a false choice.

6.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented a thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected during 15 semi-structured interviews with female leaders of diverse profiles, including lecturers, professors and senior administrators, with total work experience ranging from 13 to 33 years. Such diversity was useful in ensuring that a wide range of voices were heard.

Although most leaders of Saudi HEIs are male, the female participants suggested several factors which make women much better positioned to lead such organisations. Firstly, they argued that gender segregation caused communication to breakdown and impeded interaction and engagement between male leaders and female staff, thereby impairing men's ability to lead organisations with predominantly female staff. There was a sense that women leaders can interact with female staff not only at organisational level but right down to the personal level, which is likely in turn to improve their ability to lead female staff.

Interestingly, the interviewees also suggested that contrary to popular belief, women are good leaders. Most participants believed that women are likely to be more effective leaders of Saudi HEIs, purely because of the nature of the job, which requires cooperation rather than competition, making women's gentle, caring and supportive leadership style particularly appropriate for such institutions.

When asked about barriers, interviewees indicated that they felt that organisational and cultural barriers affected women's ability to lead and deprived them of the opportunity to lead, as well as to gain leadership skills. On the other hand, personal barriers were seen as mainly affecting women's motivation to lead in HEIs. Broadly speaking, therefore, the

barriers discussed in this research appear to affect Saudi women in terms of their ability, opportunities and motivation to lead.

The responses indicated that there was a sense that the lack of opportunities directly diminishes women's motivation, as they find it worthless to try to reach the top positions. This research has identified a strong interplay between leadership opportunities, ability and motivation in the case of Saudi females working in HEIs. In this respect, it might be said that Saudi women feel themselves to be caught up in a self-reinforcing circle, as illustrated in Figure 8.

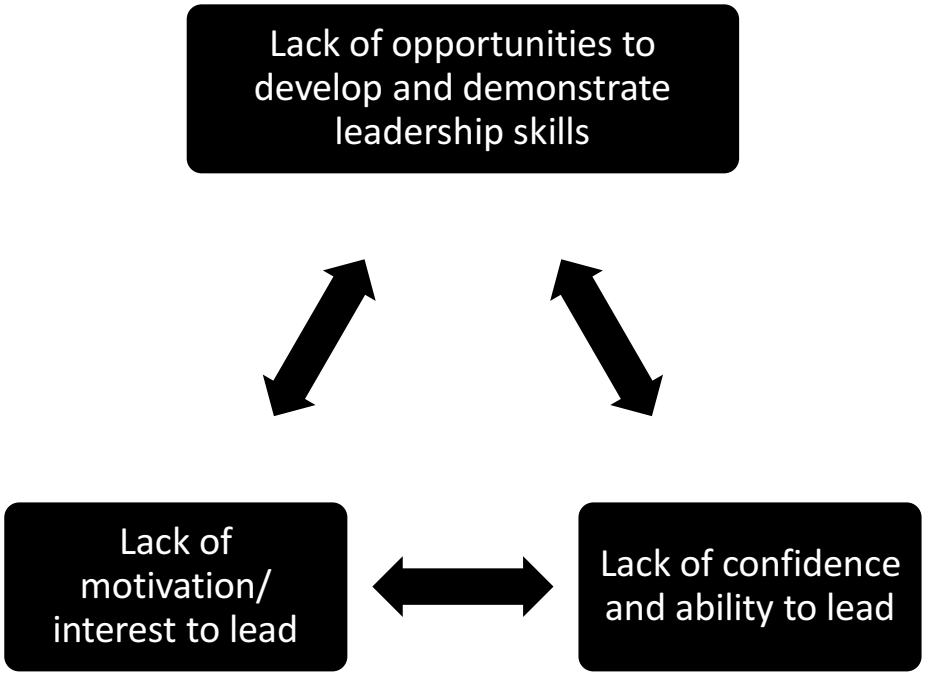

Figure 8 Interrelationship between ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership

On the subject of the Saudi government's Vision 2030 reforms, interviewees expressed the expectation that these would affect their ability, motivation and opportunities. Most believed that Vision 2030 would open up opportunities for women in terms not only of sectors and fields of employment, but also of the positions they could occupy. They believed that this would be likely to lead to the emergence of positive role models, thereby motivating other women to seek leadership positions.

Chapter 7 Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Leadership is an area that has proved significantly challenging for women around the world because of the manner in which they have been marginalised in achieving leadership positions (Aldoubi, 2014; Blandford et al., 2011; AlMunajjed, 2010; Blackmore, 2010). Such exclusion or marginalisation is evident in almost all fields including education (Aldoubi, 2014) and in most countries, albeit to a varying extents (AlHarbi, 2015). Women have to face many difficulties and challenges in achieving leadership positions, including lack of leadership opportunities and of institutional and social support for aspiring women leaders. The leadership of women in the field of education has been the main topic of this thesis. It includes a comprehensive review of the literature to help understand the concept and scenarios of women's leadership in Saudi HEIs. Among its themes have been the obstacles identified as confronting women in Saudi Arabia as they seek leadership positions. It has been shown that although the participation of Saudi Arabian women in education has been increased, a limited number are able to obtain senior positions in educational institutions. This thesis examined various definitions of leadership, including as the senior-most management position within an institution or organisation. Furthermore, leadership provides implicit power to the individual who holds this position. Another important concept that has been identified is that leadership positions are closely associated with the responsibility and right of higher-level decision making (Northouse, 2010).

The literature review included in this thesis found that it is very challenging for women to achieve leadership positions in Saudi HEIs. Despite the significant debate in the literature regarding the contribution of women's leadership, women are often underrepresented in all economic and social spheres. The literature reveals that very little has been known regarding women's leadership and especially in the field of higher education in Saudi Arabia (Abalkhail, 2017). It has been found that similar to the academic imperialism which is characterised by inequality in academic opportunities, much of the literature inclined towards exploring the role of women in leadership positions (including the field of higher

education) has emerged from Western countries. While some research has been conducted on the subject in the context of Saudi Arabia, the research is largely focused on identifying the barriers that may affect the professional progression of women, but it does not fully investigate the drivers of these barriers and how they may be changing with time. This is one of the key gaps that this thesis has addressed by focusing on the current and expected future state of these barriers in view of the transitional forces that are shaping the socio-economic environment in Saudi Arabia.

Mercer (2013) and Khuong and Chi (2017) refer to a *glass ceiling effect* for women as a broad term which includes all tangible and intangible barriers that obstruct the progression of women in higher management and leadership positions. In the interviews reported in this thesis, most respondents agreed on the existence of tangible and intangible barriers for women in Saudi HEIs and these barriers, according to the definitions proposed by Mercer (2013) and Khuong and Chi (2017), exercise a glass ceiling effect. The glass ceiling has been widely reported to affect women in almost all industrial sectors throughout the world, although to differing extents (Coleman, 2011). Several authors have confirmed the existence of a glass ceiling effect in the higher education sector around the world (for example, Gregory-Mina, 2012) including in Saudi Arabia (for example, Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

The glass ceiling effect includes all invisible barriers which are not formulated in law but applied as if they were laws, to prevent the professional rise to the top of certain sectors of society, such as women (Tran, 2015). It consists of several barriers, but mostly involves organisational barriers such as lack of promotion and leadership opportunities. However, in counties like Saudi Arabia, women face additional cultural and personal barriers which accentuate the issue (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). AlDoubi (2014) states that "the extent to which glass ceiling effects bar access for women to leadership positions depends on the gender distribution among industries." However, this thesis finds that despite an equal representation of men and women in higher education, women's representation in leadership positions is not proportionate.

Saudi Arabian society is generally considered to be conservative and patriarchal, according women limited freedom and opportunities to pursue careers of their choice, making them

the victims of societal oppression (AlHarbi, 2015). However, modernity and economic advancement have significantly influenced and improved the position and status of women in that society. Their participation in the social, economic and political spheres has significantly improved over the last two decades (Gorney, 2016). In particular, there has been a significant push in reforms in this respect since the announcement of the Vision 2030 project by the Saudi government. Some of the ultra-conservative barriers, such as male guardianship laws, have been removed. One of the key contributions of this thesis has been to highlight the transformation that has been taking place in Saudi society since the launch of Vision 2030. Women nevertheless have to face an array of legislation, rules and social practices which impact their personal and professional lives and restrict their freedom to make decisions (Gonaim, 2016).

The literature discusses various barriers that hamper the career growth of women in Saudi Arabia. For example, cultural traditions such as the male guardianship rules (Quamar, 2016; Fatany, 2013) and societal norms such as women's role as homemaker pose barriers for women and restrict them from achieving leadership positions (Abalkhail, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Mobaraki and Söderfeldt, 2010). However, with the changing time and significant technological and economic advancements in Saudi Arabia, the status of women is improving and they are finding new ways to overcome such barriers (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). In this context, this thesis can be significant in providing a new perspective regarding the changing role of women in Saudi Arabian society. The existing literature provides limited understanding regarding the challenges that women might have to face in career advancement. Therefore, this thesis can provide an important insight towards understanding the challenges the women face and the enablers that they use to overcome such challenges (Abalkhail, 2017; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

This chapter will discuss the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research conducted in this study. The quantitative data were obtained by means of a closed-ended survey questionnaire, measuring 51 items on a five-point Likert scale, while the qualitative data were collected during 15 semi-structured interviews, the data then being subjected to thematic analysis. This process has provided new insights towards understanding the role of women in leadership positions in higher education. This chapter will provide a detailed

discussion of the primary findings and a synthesis of the findings from the literature, as well as from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

The sections below discuss in turn the different themes and concepts identified from primary and secondary research.

7.2 Organisational barriers

7.2.1 Key organisational barriers affecting Saudi women's accession to leadership in HEIs

The first main organisational barrier that was identified through the data collected from the questionnaire is the glass ceiling effect that restricts women from achieving higher positions within organisations. The survey results indicate that women believe that men have greater access to power in HE leadership. Survey respondents ranked this as the most critical barrier to women's leadership. Thirteen of the fifteen interviewees also suggested that poor access to leadership for Saudi women affects their progression to leadership. In other words, it is a self-reinforcing cycle of barriers, where poor access to leadership leads to poor representation in leadership and vice versa. Researchers agree that there is a great deal of gender discrimination in access to leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Hodges, 2017; Alsuwaida, 2016; Abalkhail, 2015; Aldoubi, 2014). The literature asserts that the glass ceiling effect is the main problem that restricts women from achieving higher management or leadership positions. Studies conducted by Jahangirov et al. (2015), Tran (2015) and Reed (2014) have also identified the glass ceiling effect as a significant barrier that prevents women from achieving higher management positions. These studies conclude that there are various invisible barriers arising from organisational and personal discrimination and prejudices that restrict women. Sirvis (2005) states that in higher education, women are often given leadership within the classroom, to teach and guide young students (mainly females), but the senior management is still dominated by males. According to the survey results reported in this thesis, the glass ceiling effect is one of the most significant barriers for women to achieve a leadership position, which is consistent with the findings reported in the literature. Several authors have grouped organisational barriers under the term 'glass ceiling effect'. However, this effect includes not only organisational barriers but also cultural and societal factors (Rathore, 2017; Schipani,

Dworkin, Kwolek-Folland and Maurer, 2008) and to some extent, even personal barriers, as societal and organisational barriers often influence women's self-perception and consequently their personal barriers. However, some authors (such as Munoz, 2010; Pompper, 2011) link the glass ceiling effect with organisational barriers. They state that its primary cause is that most organisations and institutions have been primarily designed for men. This thesis confirms these findings by reporting that the women leaders expressed the belief that systems and structures of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are also designed according to men. For example, a female university is often combined with a male one under a common head. In the context of the glass ceiling effect, some authors argue that leaders often reproduce themselves, i.e. they select individuals who are similar to them for future leadership roles (AlDoubi, 2014). This is also a common factor in Saudi Arabia, as four interviewees suggested that lack of connections (with senior leaders) affected their prospects of reaching top positions.

Another organisational barrier that women face is that they are presumed to be less able than men. The survey respondents in this study ranked this as the fourth most significant barrier to their advancement. A study conducted by Rajkhan (2014) has also found that women are considered to be less capable than men and that they are different by nature; therefore, they are not considered for management positions in the same way as men. This discrimination affects women and their career advancement. A recent study conducted by Hodges (2017) has confirmed that the barriers that women experience in organisations affect their leadership practice. Therefore, women in Saudi Arabia face difficulty in climbing the career ladder, as demonstrated by both the survey and the interviews in the present study. This also means that women are currently facing some of the same issues as identified in earlier studies and there has been limited change in their progress. However, things have changed significantly since the interviews were conducted; for example, the male guardianship laws which were highlighted as a key barrier in almost all past research have been relaxed. There have also been several key developments regarding the liberation and empowerment of women, such as the opening up of possibilities for them to work in any sector and a relaxation in the rules regarding their interactions with unknown men. Such changes have removed within a span of just a few months some of the key barriers that women had faced for over 70 years in Saudi Arabia. The results

reported in earlier chapters of this thesis do not fully capture these changes, many of which were announced during the final writing up stage, after data collection had been completed. Further research will be needed in a few years to measure the extent to which these changes influence the barriers affecting women leaders in Saudi HEIs.

Researchers such as Hodges (2017), Alsuwaida (2016) and Thompson (2015) have also focused on identifying the significant influence of power on the societal roles of men and women; the present study has found that patriarchal power has resulted in the development of a discriminatory attitude towards women while granting more opportunities and power to men. Greater access to power was ranked as the first and most significant barrier in the survey results, as the gender difference is deeply rooted in Saudi Arabian society and power has been concentrated in the hands of men. The survey results also show that access to power is easier for males than females. However, the perspective of women working in Saudi HEIs is different. For example, women were found to have a stronger sense of responsibility than men, as confirmed by Thompson (2015). Female interviewees expressed the view that they were capable and willing to take on leadership roles but tended to be demotivated by the range of barriers they faced in achieving higher leadership positions. For example, twelve of the fifteen identified a lack of authoritative power and of exposure to leadership as key organisational barriers affecting their progression to leadership.

Seven of the fifteen interviewees suggested that women have a more empathetic, supporting and caring leadership style as compared to men. Furthermore, five interviewees stated that women have the ability to see things from different perspectives, such as looking at solutions from a long-term perspective, managing wider stakeholder interests etc. According to these five interviewees, women leaders are able to understand and communicate more with women employees due to issues such as gender segregation. Other authors support the view that women leaders may exhibit feminine leadership traits such as inclusiveness, empathy and teamworking, all of which may be more suitable in the university environment (Eagly, 2007), as universities aim to develop people rather than compete to achieve business objectives (AlDoubi, 2014). Nine interviewees explicitly highlighted such reasons for including women in leadership positions, while the remaining six did not express any disagreement with the contention that women bring new and

possibly effective leadership skills. However, the condition is still different, as women face barriers in climbing the leadership ladder; the interviewees reported that they had seen many deserving candidates being denied fair opportunities to rise to leadership positions. Nine interviewees also suggested that men have more opportunities than women to achieve career success and to accede to leadership and higher management positions in higher education.

Abalkhail and Allan (2015) assert that male-dominated norms and rules are highly prevalent in Saudi society, due to which decision making is mostly in the hands of men, who give one another preference over females in achieving high positions. The gender segregation and societal norms regarding the different capabilities of men and women have also resulted in granting women a lower status than men in all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. Sandler (1993) further notes that women are often discounted or not considered to have the potential to achieve leadership positions because of their gender. Such perceptions may lead to fewer leadership opportunities for Saudi women, which in turn deprives them of opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills and capabilities, as was also suggested by the interviewees.

Almost two-thirds of survey respondents (162 out of 253) agreed that women feel themselves to have lower status than men because of their gender, making this the second most significant organisational barrier for them. However, the qualitative findings from the interviews suggest that interviewees felt that most of the women working in HE have better leadership skills than men; nine of the fifteen respondents argued that women's leadership skills are more suitable for HEIs than are men's, because HEIs require empathetic, caring and supportive leaders who can nurture talent. Interviewees stated that women are capable of playing leadership roles in their organisations, as they have demonstrated by excelling in whatever opportunities they have been given to lead. This suggests that women have confidence in their capabilities and do not feel that their status in society is lower than that of men. Participants also believed that women have more strength and sense of responsibility than men and can do certain tasks that men cannot do. Smith (2002) found that men consciously or unconsciously excluded women from leadership roles to maintain the status quo. However, the findings of this thesis suggest that women are confident about the skills and capabilities that can help them to overcome

various organisational barriers such as lack of support from peers, lack of financial power and submitting all decisions to male approval.

7.2.2 The effect of organisational barriers on women's ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership in Saudi HEIs

Organisational barriers can significantly influence the personal motivation, abilities and opportunities for women to achieve leadership positions. Some of these barriers, such as gender-based division or sexist behaviour towards female employees, have been identified as a problem that impacts women's motivation and abilities (Mullen, 2009). The literature also states that females are often left to take on additional responsibilities, such as teaching and delivering course material, while the potential management role of managing student's credentials and conducting research is often in the hand of male employees (Sandler, 1993). This condition affects women's motivation and influences their perception of their own capabilities and abilities. One interviewee in the current study stated that women leaders are involved in general student development programmes or as the faculty, which is not fun or inclusive. Therefore, the centralised top-down leadership affects their capabilities and motivation.

Another organisational barrier that was identified by an interviewee was the perception that male leaders often lack understanding regarding critical issues facing female staff or female students. This could be because of their autocratic leadership style and lack of knowledge and empathy regarding the problems faced by women. Studies (for example, Kattan, et al., 2016; Almunajjed, 2010) have found that male leaders, or those who have power, are often inconsiderate towards the hard work, commitment and quality of work of female employees, while the women themselves believe that hard work will be recognised and rewarded and that they will have the opportunity to achieve higher management positions. Interviewees also asserted that their hard work and commitment was not acknowledged by male leaders. Chin (2011) reports a similar finding, that if women believed that their hard work and commitment would not be rewarded, it reduced their own motivation. Male domination of the HE sector in Saudi Arabia affects women significantly, as male managers or senior management personnel prefer to promote other males ahead of more skilled female employees (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Bagilhole and White

(2008) state that the presence of women within many organisations is seen as a mere token. Such organisational barriers reduce the motivation and opportunities for females to achieve leadership positions.

According to the survey results, one factor that affects women's motivation is that they often feel that their status in society is lower than that of men. This problem, ranked as the second most significant organisational barrier in a survey conducted by Carli and Eagly (2011), affects women's capabilities and motivations. It can also be seen as the impact of gender stereotyping and gender discrimination, affecting women's leadership by damaging their self-confidence, which is considered an important quality for successful leaders (Diel and Dzubinski, 2016). Another organisational barrier that women experience and which affects their capabilities, motivation and opportunities is that the current organisational policies and systems are mainly designed by men and do not effectively take account of the problems of women or the way they live their lives in Saudi Arabia. The result is increasing difficulty for women to maintain their work-life balance, with many having to leave work because the burden of a dual workload makes them so tired that they cannot fulfil their family role. Jahangirov et al. (2015), Awang-Hashim et al. (2016) and Alsubaie and Jones (2017) also found that in Islamic countries, most organisational structures are patriarchal in nature. This is particularly true of Middle Eastern countries, whose social and political structures are based on a stricter implementation of Shariah principles than in other Islamic nations such as Malaysia and Pakistan.

Many interviewees stated that women often feel frustrated because despite significant experience, they are not promoted to top management positions; twelve of the fifteen interviewees expressed frustration that women are not considered for leadership positions, while ten expressed disappointment over lack of leadership exposure for women in Saudi HEIs. This finding is consistent with that of Grogan and Shakeshift (2011), who found that male leaders were unaware of the issues and challenges facing women, thus hampering the progress of the female workers in organisations. Eleven of the fifteen interviewees each had over fifteen years of experience in the same university, while only two had less than ten years of such experience, indicating that they were likely to have a significant understanding of the issues and challenges that women face. However, they felt frustrated because they lacked decision-making power. The value-based discrimination,

unequal access to power and difference in status among between male leaders and female employees are significant factors that can reduce the motivation of women and restrict their career growth.

The interview analysis also helps in identifying some significant organisational barriers, such as the lack of training and support for women, lack of required connections, lack of authoritative power and lack of knowledge regarding the promotion criteria. These are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Abalkhail (2017), who found that women are often exposed to discriminatory practices in terms of providing leadership training and promotion. Almansour and Kempner (2016) conclude that for leaders, it is important to participate in the social or public sphere, which is significantly difficult for Saudi Arabian women, due to gender segregation and cultural restrictions. This results in an organisational barrier for them, but it is expected to change as the Vision 2030 project is implemented and the Saudi government pushes aggressively for women's wider participation in the workforce. This may eventually lead to a lowering of restrictions on public representation by women, even in male-dominated circles. At the time of the interviews, the discriminatory organisational practices and biased promotion policies were mentioned by respondents as major organisational barriers affecting motivation and opportunities for women. These organisational barriers reported by the interviewees provide evidence of their sense that there is a glass ceiling inhibiting their access to leadership positions and career progression.

7.2.3 Possible solutions for the removal of organisational barriers

The removal of the organisational barriers identified here would require some policy-level interventions by the Saudi government. Governments can play an important role in promoting women's empowerment by developing policies that would include more female leaders in decision-making roles (AccountAbility and Glowork, 2017; Metcalfe, 2008). Recently, the Saudi government introduced a number of steps including the appointment of some women to senior leadership positions. Such steps may embolden women who aspire to be leaders and may alleviate perceived barriers to leadership positions. Other researchers (for example, Gazzaz, 2017; Alomair, 2015; AccountAbility and Glowork, 2017) support the view that having more role models can help women overcome many

organisational and even personal barriers to leadership in Saudi Arabia. The restrictions imposed on the public roles of Saudi women until very recently reinforced the glass ceiling effect as a lack of socio-political representation paralysed policymaking with reference to women. However, recent measures announced and implemented under Vision 2030 seem to be addressing many of these oppressive issues. For example, some of the measures that have seriously affected the professional development of women in Saudi Arabia are allowing them to drive and removing the need for them to seek permission from male guardians for many activities. Policymakers should look at eradicating the aforementioned organisational barriers by giving women the opportunity to display their skills and capabilities and allowing them to participate more effectively in decision making.

One of the key issues raised by past researchers relates to leaders' contextual awareness while devising and implementing strategy (Calo et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Peleg, 2012; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The findings reported in this thesis also indicate that women working in female universities have long experience in their workplaces, most having served for more than a decade. Eleven of the fifteen respondents had more than fifteen years' experience working in the same institution, while two had more than ten years of such experience. These long tenures may be useful in understanding all aspects of the university management processes. They may also furnish a better understanding of the leadership role, such as more effective engagement and collaborative working with other workers. Therefore, this thesis suggests that organisational barriers can be addressed by allowing women leaders to develop the policies and systems for their own workplaces, considering the challenges that they have faced. This is not only likely to boost their confidence but may also help them to display their capabilities and abilities more effectively. Developing policies and standards according to the lives and social responsibilities of women may be helpful in more effective engagement of female workers. Policies that can promote work-life balance can be effective for female employees and leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Removing barriers to women's rise to leadership positions in Saudi HEIs is significant for empowering them and for improving their work engagement (Gazzaz, 2017; Alomair, 2015). This thesis suggests that developing national policies to promote opportunities for women would be beneficial in increasing the participation of women in top management

positions, thus benefiting more fully from their qualities, capabilities and experience. These are similar to the recommendations made by AccountAbility and Glowork (2017). Removing the communication barrier within organisations was identified as an important factor that can help in improving women's leadership. This thesis finds that due to gender segregation, male leadership of female institutions creates an environment that supresses dialogue between leaders and employees. Indeed, respondents asserted that organisational barriers can be significantly reduced by improving communication between leaders and other employees, as it will boost confidence among the female employees and will help them to display their capabilities, which is important in achieving leadership status in future. This thesis finds that in order to overcome organisational barriers, women should be provided with better work-life management opportunities, with more cooperative peer behaviour and opportunities to develop connections with a wider research community.

Nine of the fifteen interviewees complained of a lack of leadership training opportunities, while the remaining six did not make any comment on this matter, suggesting that women require more effective training opportunities. One of the respondents declared that training should be more practical rather than theoretical and complained of a failure to audit the training programmes run by universities. Many authors, such as Kattan et al. (2016) and Siddique, Khan and Zia (2016) have expressed the view that Saudi women need to be trained for leadership positions but that there is lack of adequate leadership training opportunities for them. Therefore, developing more effective training programmes and conducting detailed audits of their success and effectiveness would be useful in lowering some organisational barriers, as the interviewees identified poor development of leadership skills as a key organisational barrier.

7.3 Cultural and traditional barriers

7.3.1 Key cultural barriers affecting Saudi women's accession to leadership in HEIs

A study conducted by Cheaupalakit (2014) identified cultural barriers as the root cause of the glass ceiling effect, restricting women from achieving leadership positions. Culture is

often deeply rooted in the societal and institutional structures that create a glass ceiling effect for women and block their access to leadership (Katuna, 2014). The culture of Saudi Arabia is patriarchal, putting almost all decision-making power in the hands of males. However, survey results reported in this thesis show that more than half of the female participants disagreed that decision-making power should be left with men. Similarly, the interview analysis shows participants to have suggested that women are better at taking decisions due to their inherent qualities of leadership and the fact that they see challenges differently to the way that men perceive them. Seven of the fifteen interviewees suggested that women leaders are likely to be more caring, empathetic and supportive towards their employees and that these are traits that are quite useful in universities, where the focus is on skill development.

Abalkhail and Allan (2016) conclude that the most significant issue that Saudi women face is that their patriarchal culture and gender-based differences are deeply rooted in their society. Therefore, women have to depend on males in their families for all decision making and for their wider social connections (Doumato, 2010). Embedded cultural values also mean that society prefers the dominant male leadership traits, perceives women as lacking leadership skills and considers that they are best suited for the roles of wives and mothers (Sidani et al., 2015). In contrast, interviewees in the present study asserted that Saudi women's leadership traits are not only different from those of Saudi men but superior, as the cultural values that emphasise their role as carers have made them more empathetic, caring and understanding. Furthermore, some interviewees believed that gender should not be among the selection criteria for leadership. A study conducted by Dimovski, Skerlavaj and Man (2010) also concluded that women's management skills are somewhat better than those of their male counterparts, as women tend to have a more inclusive, participative leadership approach compared to men, who are more likely to practice an autocratic leadership approach.

Culture has been found to dominate the attitudes, perceptions and values of individuals. Thus, the literature states that according to Saudi Arabian tradition and culture, women are expected to play the roles of mothers and wives, while males have responsibility for supporting the family financially. For example, Abalkhail and Allan (2015) found that despite having more managerial experience and skills than men, women are often passed

over for top management positions and preference is given to males, mainly because of the cultural and religious attitudes to gender roles predominant in Saudi society. Alshammari (2018) identifies culture and tradition as the main reasons for women often to be denied their fundamental rights in Saudi Arabian society, resulting in a lack of freedom to travel, work, vote, seek treatment etc. However, the results of the survey reported in this thesis reveal that the perspective of women is changing regarding their traditional and cultural roles, as 76% of respondents (192 out of 253) significantly disagreed that it is the sole responsibility of women to take care of family and children, while 64.4% (163 women) disagreed that women should stay at home and should not work. The result of this changing perspective is that more women are looking to enhance their professional skills and credentials, such as by undertaking education in scientific subjects. Women are looking for more employment opportunities and career advancement as Vision 2030 brings new opportunities for them to acquire more desirable and employable skill sets, such as in STEM subjects.

This thesis has identified other important cultural barriers that can restrict women's career progress. These include women sacrificing their careers for children and husbands (Al-Asfour et al., 2017), women placing family before career (Marinakou, 2014), only men having the leadership capabilities, and women not going to work and taking jobs from men (Airin, 2010). Such barriers affect not only Saudi women but also those in other counties, albeit the impact may be to a different extent in different countries. For example, socio-cultural factors have a more prominent impact on Saudi women as compared to those in Western countries. The interviewees expressed the belief that in spite of their significant knowledge and experience, Saudi women are still inadequately represented in leadership roles. Despite having relevant qualifications, the career growth of women is very slow in comparison to men, as can be seen by a significant difference in the proportional representation of women in the workforce in general compared with those in leadership positions. The survey and interview analysis found that restrictions on the appointment of women and exercising gender-based discrimination are some traditional factors that occur in the form of invisible barriers, resulting in the career growth of women being stunted, consistent with a finding of Alshammari (2018). The present study has also found that the major cultural and traditional barrier to women is that they are seen exclusively as

homemakers and stereotyped as fit only for this role. For most people in society, this stereotyping has become a reality; the interviewees suggested that women leaders are often considered immoral, as they are believed to be overlooking their familial responsibilities. This is also a significant reason why interviewees believed that despite a woman having similar qualifications and capabilities to those of a man, he would be preferred for a leadership post over her. This finding is in line with that of Morley, Berma and Hamid (2017), who state that women do not receive the same treatment as men. Such issues affect women worldwide and researchers from many different parts of the world have acknowledged that gender-based inequality is common in most countries.

All fifteen of the interviewees agreed that women's highly restricted access to leadership in Saudi Arabian higher education is not explained by any lack of skills and competencies among female employees, but rather by a number of unseen barriers that women face at all levels, such as lack of leadership training and lack of top leadership positions. It has also been found that poor representation in leadership positions and decision-making roles results in people developing a poor perspective regarding the capabilities of women, thus creating a significant barrier for them (Alexander, 2013). Interview respondents suggested that Saudi women have little freedom to make decisions in the workplace, as they are often not involved in making management-related decisions. This is an organisational barrier, as women are often excluded from top-level decision making in organisations. It is also a cultural and traditional barrier, as women are often not allowed to make important decisions in their lives, with practices such as *mehram* preventing them from doing so. Being restricted from decision making has emerged from the cultural perspective of considering women as passive onlookers and men as being active (Moghadam, 2009). Saudi women do have decision-making roles at home, but in a professional environment or for official matters, men are the primary decision-makers. This could be because of the very recently revoked male guardianship laws, which required authorisation from men for women to access most public services or to do almost anything significant outside the home.

Limiting women's freedom to move beyond the personal sphere, restricting their participation in the economy and separating the sexes are all examples of cultural barriers. Although studies have identified these barriers as not being officially determined by

religion or faith, they are real and certainly limit women's movement in the public sphere (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015). Abalkhail (2017) also found that national culture could have a significant impact on the rights, freedoms and professional lives of women. Therefore, the cultural norms of Saudi Arabian society remain the major obstacle for women to achieve career advancement. Only 27% of survey respondents agreed that women and men are encouraged to take equal responsibility for the family, which means that it is still women who have to take care of their families and fulfil responsibilities towards their children. The cultural barriers are also related to the number of children that women have; the survey results show that women with small families or no children reported facing fewer cultural challenges. This also indicates that a greater number of children places more pressure on a woman to care for her family and increases family expectations, which makes it difficult for them to maintain a work-life balance. Studies conducted by Arar and Oplatka (2016) and Arar (2015) have found that cultural and traditional expectations regarding gender roles also shape women's expectations regarding leadership positions.

7.3.2 The effect of cultural barriers on ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs

The findings of the literature review indicate that cultural barriers are significantly associated with a higher prevalence of stereotyping and discrimination against women. Therefore, such practices and cultural perspectives have a significant impact on women and on their career-related abilities and motivations (Eagly, 2007). The stereotypical view of women is as emotionally dependent and less productive than men. The legacy of male domination in Saudi society has resulted in the establishment of a culture that considers men as strong and women as weak, and this perspective is not just associated with physical strength, but applies to all aspects of life; women are considered to be weaker than men, whether in relation to decision making or to acquiring leadership positions (Tlaiss and Dirani 2015).

Women's motivation to acquire leadership positions and their ability to do so are also affected by the psychological challenges arising from cultural and traditional restrictions. For example, women in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries are raised to be passive, to submit themselves to males and to dedicate their lives to their families (AlDoubi, 2014).

This enforced passivity can result in a form of psychological conflict that can restrict women's career advancement, by weakening their motivation (Hodges, 2017). Women's social and personal networks are rooted in family hierarchies and kinship (Abalkhail and Allan 2016). Therefore, the hierarchies and patriarchal systems within families and society can demotivate women and restrict them from attaining good positions. This is also a significant reason why women are considered to be suitable only for the roles of mothers and wives, even if they have graduated from higher education (Hodges, 2017). As many as 81% of the survey respondents (205 out of 253) and eleven of the fifteen interviewees disagreed with the proposition that women are meant only for such roles, but their responses suggest that changing the relevant cultural and traditional perspectives and attitudes would require a long time.

Some of the other cultural barriers that restrict women are the negative perceptions of members of Saudi society of women in leadership roles (identified by eight interviewees) and their negative perceptions of women's leadership style (thirteen interviewees). This negative perception perhaps comes from the cultural perceptions and attitudes that people have. Six interviewees suggested that there is a stereotyping of women as poor decision-makers which has, over time, led to a decline in confidence in women's leadership qualities. Such stereotyping has been reported by several other authors, such as Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair (2017), Stark and Zawojska (2015), Sikdar and Mitra (2012) and Kauser and Tlaiss (2011).

Eleven of the fifteen interviewees suggested that insufficient leadership opportunities have damaged confidence in the leadership capabilities of women. This may explain why women in Saudi Arabian society are not considered as potential leaders, because of the mindset that people have towards their capabilities (Hodges, 2017). This negatively affects the motivations and opportunities for women to attain top management positions and decision-making power. One interviewee (SLEC_17) commented that "bad decisions taken by men are forgotten, while the wrong decisions taken by women are constantly associated with their leadership style", thus continuously reminding women of their supposed deficit of capabilities and skills. This can potentially also demotivate women by building the perception that they can never be good leaders. The present study has found that cultural barriers, in common with the glass ceiling effect, are not visible but reflected through the

discriminatory attitudes and perceptions of men within society (Alshammari, 2018). One of the respondents suggested that the decision-making power of women is weak because leadership and decision making are learnt through experience and practice; cultural restrictions on women in Saudi Arabian society have limited their participation in decision making, thus gradually diminishing the skills and capability to make decisions. This has also resulted in the participant's belief that women's capabilities, motivations and opportunities to climb the leadership ladder are affected.

Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan (2017) argue that the culturally backward and conservative mindset of the Saudi people is significantly influenced by the perspective of their cultural and religious scholars. This was confirmed by three interviewees, who suggested that some religious preachers depict professional women as immoral and exert pressure on them to choose between their profession and social image. For example, Alsheha (2000, cited by Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan, 2017) has asserted that educating males and females together is a sin and will result in moral decay. This kind of thinking comes from the conservative cultural values that have diminished the status of women in Saudi society. The conservative thinking of religious scholars also influences the thinking and perspectives of the general public. This is particularly common in Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, because Muslim culture is highly dependent on the interpretation of the Quran, which instructs adherents on how to live and to practice their culture and traditions (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Religious leaders have traditionally held a significant position in Saudi society, so much so that their words cannot be overruled, even by the courts (Alotaibi et al., 2017). The powerful *ulema* have often seen women leaders as a threat to the societal norms regarding the roles of males and females; as a result, any government moves towards reforms favouring women's liberation are strongly opposed by religious leaders as a threat to the Islamic traditions on which Saudi culture was founded (Metcalfe, 2011). In short, it has proved difficult or impossible to push through any reforms of this kind. This was confirmed by some interviewees who remained sceptical about the promised reforms, arguing that it may not be easy for the Saudi government to actually implement them, primarily because of stiff resistance from the orthodox sections of society. However, the Saudi government appears to have finally taken control of such reforms with the introduction of Vision 2030 and has therefore been able to introduce sweeping changes

such as the relaxation of the male guardianship laws, which was once considered almost impossible.

Six of the interviewees explicitly suggested that the beliefs widely held in Saudi society that women are supposed to only look after the family and not do any work outside the home are all without any foundation in the Quran or Shariah. According to them, such religion-based arguments are often given to pressurise women into giving up their professional aspirations. Metcalfe (2011) has also stated that the misinterpretation of Islamic beliefs has led to a gender-segregated culture. The religious institutions also play an important role in the social, political and economic system of the country and influence policies and systems in all domains. Therefore, the conservative religious, traditional and cultural perspective has resulted in the progress of women being delayed. These cultural and religious perceptions are often translated into organisational policies and practices which restrict women's freedom to work effectively, to display their skills and capabilities and to achieve top management positions (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Arar and Oplatka, 2016). This directly or indirectly affects the will, motivation and opportunities for women to become leaders in organisations.

Arar and Oplatka (2016) identify Saudi family law as another significant factor restricting the freedom of women and forming a patriarchal society. Saudi family law has always given precedence to the views of males over those of females, so much so that women have been deprived of the possibility to live a life free of male control. For example, women were always required to have a male guardian's permission for any activity outside the home, including seeking legal or medical help or obtaining a passport. However, this seems to be changing under the recent set of reforms, such as the relaxation of male guardianship laws, introduced by the Saudi government. Interviewees expressed optimism that the relaxation of practices such as *mehram* will lead to a slow but gradual change in the mindset of Saudi people which may help in easing some of the social pressures that professional women face in Saudi society.

The survey results indicate that women's education level was significant in the extent of their disagreement with the validity of cultural restrictions; participants with a master's degree seemed to have slightly greater resistance to the notion of cultural challenges than

those holding doctorates or bachelor's degrees. In the survey conducted for this study, women with higher educational qualifications were more likely to disagree with the cultural restrictions and barriers. It was also found that women's attitudes towards their own status was changing, with an overwhelming 85.4% of survey respondents (216 out of 253) disagreeing that women should not work and 70% disagreeing with the assertion that only men should earn money. It appears that Saudi women are becoming more aware of their rights and understand better the factors that are impeding their economic progress. The interview analysis helped in identifying cultural mindset as a major demotivating factor for women, as all fifteen interviewees cited a number of cultural factors as barriers to women's progression to leadership. It has been found that women who are successful in their careers have to face negativity from members of society, as eight of the fifteen interviewees reported negative perceptions of women in leadership and only one disagreed with this. This negative attitude to their success comes not only from outsiders but also from their own family members. Therefore, this thesis confirms the finding of Asfour and Khan (2014) that cultural expectations have made leadership an exclusive domain for men.

7.3.3 Possible solutions for lowering cultural barriers

All fifteen interviewees expressed the opinion that improving leadership skills among women and enhancing their capability to make decisions would require a significant change in cultural mindset. Thus, the findings reported in this thesis include the contention that "policymakers should focus on making policies and systems that could bring a change in cultural mindset" (DOF_29), thereby promoting managerial and leadership skills among women. According to the interview analysis, this cultural mindset can be changed only through the efforts of government to produce policies and programmes that promote the participation of women in higher management positions, recognising that the skills and capabilities of women are different from those of men but equally valuable and showing how organisations can become more successful by exploiting the skills and capabilities of women leaders. "Role models can help in eliminating several personal and internal barriers that women may face in achieving leadership positions" (DOA_31). Albakry (2016) notes that there are some women, albeit very limited in number, who have reached decision-

making and leadership positions, and suggests that they are those who have been strongly self-motivated and committed and who have displayed assertive behaviour. This suggests that other women working in the field of higher education can be motivated by such models to commit to their work despite various cultural limitations.

Women can use their knowledge and education to overcome the conservative attitudes towards them which spring largely from the structures, practices and beliefs of tribal communities living in the Arabian Peninsula long before Islam was established (Al-bakr et al., 2017). Women were dominated by men in these communities and were placed in submissive and passive roles in society (Metcalfe, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that it is not Islam that has taken away the freedom of women, but the patriarchal society that uses Islam to perpetuate its conservative attitude to women (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Arar and Oplatka, 2016). The literature also helped to show that women around the world have fought for and are fighting for their rights and equality and that they have resisted all forms of male domination and patriarchy (Alexander, 2013). This thesis suggests that women in Saudi Arabia need to overcome the glass ceiling effect, surmount the cultural and traditional challenges and work towards eradicating false societal assumptions regarding their skills and leadership capabilities.

Awareness of personal rights and freedoms also encourages women to stand against conservative cultural norms (Al-Suwaihel, 2009). This finding was supported by nine of the fifteen interviewees, who agreed that participation in higher education builds knowledge and increases women's awareness of their rights and freedoms. Educated women are likely to be more aware of government efforts to empower women, eliminate discriminatory practices and promote social awareness of the personal and human rights that women deserve (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Such efforts are important in overcoming cultural and traditional barriers.

7.4 Personal and psychological barriers

7.4.1 Key personal barriers to Saudi women's accession to leadership in HEIs

In every aspect of their careers, women face many personal barriers and challenges that restrict them from achieving the heights to which they aspire (Hodges, 2017). Some personal barriers are related to women's status as married or single. The survey results support the findings of previous studies by concluding that being married and having children is a major challenge and a personal barrier for women in achieving higher management or leadership positions in HE. Eckel et al. (2009) and Touchton (2008) have found that women who are able to achieve leadership positions are often those who are unmarried or divorced, which leads to the conclusion that family responsibility and motherhood are often personal barriers that restrict women from reaching leadership positions. However, these findings are in contrast with those obtained from analysis of the interview data reported in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Seven of the fifteen interviewees suggested that women are born leaders, as "they play many leadership roles as a wife and a mother in their personal life and their personal life could not restrict them from achieving heights in their career" (DOA_30). Nine interviewees, including SPROF_20, also believed that women are more emotional and empathetic than men and that this caring nature can be an asset for them as leaders in HEIs, consistent with the findings of Alsubaie and Jones (2017).

The comprehensive review of literature has collated various findings regarding the personal and psychological barriers facing women in leadership. Some of the more significant personal barriers that have been identified through the interviews are lack of confidence to lead, lack of motivation to lead, lack of interest, inadequate leadership or managerial training, insufficient experience and lack of capacity to work as a leader.

Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair (2017) have also identified culture and social circumstances as significantly influencing the thinking and perceptions not only of men but also of women. Women in Saudi Arabia experience from childhood many cultural and religious restrictions which affect their personal growth, development and capabilities. Lack of freedom, restrictions and limited personal rights also result in low self-esteem and confidence

(AlDoubi, 2014). From this develops a feeling of low self-efficacy that inhibits women from reaching or even trying to reach senior management positions in their workplaces (Tlaiss, 2014). Marinakou (2014) notes that the status of women is restricted to their domestic roles and that they then tend, consciously or unconsciously, to accept that they do not have the skills and capabilities to lead. Analysis of the interview data identified similar feelings among the women themselves that they lack the skills, capabilities, confidence and self-esteem which they would need in order to overcome the glass ceiling effect and occupy leadership positions. Eleven of the fifteen interviewees agreed—and only two disagreed—that women lack the confidence to lead; nine agreed and four disagreed that women lack the motivation to lead, while seven agreed and two disagreed that women lack interest in leading. This is somewhat different from the findings of AlDoubi (2014), which suggest that Saudi women do not lack the confidence and motivation to lead but are victims of the glass ceiling effect. One of the reasons for this difference in findings may be the selection of respondents, as AlDoubi included female professionals working at all levels, while this study included only senior managers who had played leadership roles. It is possible that Saudi women do not lack the confidence and motivation to lead at lower and middle management levels but do so in respect of the top level.

Eleven interviewees agreed that lack of confidence is a significant personal barrier that is also associated with the psychological feeling and mindset of women in Saudi Arabia. Six of the fifteen suggested that playing a subservient role to males meant that Saudi women never achieved the self-confidence needed for leadership and did not feel that they had the capabilities required. The interview responses were also found to include words such as ‘fear’, ‘hesitation’, ‘reluctance’ and ‘pressure’, which indicate a lack of confidence among the participants.

7.4.2 The effect of personal barriers on ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs

There are various social circumstances and personal characteristics that impact the capabilities, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi Arabian women. One of the most significant personal characteristics is the lack of self-confidence referred to above. As the interview analysis has shown, this amounts to such a significant barrier

that after working for decades in HEIs, women do not even try to attain leadership positions. Seven of the fifteen interviewees also stated that women display a lack of interest in obtaining higher management positions, being interested only in leaving their houses and escaping the domestic routine, as manifested in an absence of passion towards their work. This problem has been identified by Al Ghamdi (2016) and by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011), who report that many women do not want to take leadership responsibility, as they believe that maintaining the work-life balance is difficult for them. Thus, such women avoid taking any significant responsibilities and obligations in the workplace.

Shabbir, Shakeel and Zubair (2017) conclude that psychological pressure on women in Saudi Arabia is very high, because they have to fulfil many social, cultural and traditional obligations. This psychological pressure then creates a personal barrier against them seeking and occupying higher management positions. The present study found family-work balance to be the second most significant personal barrier preventing women from achieving success. Lack of confidence and self-esteem can be linked with the years of experience of playing a domestic role or being submissive towards the males in their families. The culture and traditional practices thus reduce the capabilities and motivation of women at work. Thirteen of the fifteen interviewees suggested that long working hours and child care are some important barriers that contribute to the glass ceiling effect and psychologically restrict women from achieving their aims. Therefore, their opportunities, capabilities and motivations are significantly influenced by various personal and psychological barriers, with the result that women in Saudi HEIs find it difficult to lead or to achieve decision-making positions.

7.4.3 Possible solutions for the removal of personal barriers

Fourteen respondents agreed that “training and guidance are the most significant way of preparing women for leadership roles” (HOD_21), consistent with published studies which have identified training as the most significant way of enhancing the capabilities and skills of employees (Abalkhail, 2017; Alsuwaida, 2016; Morley 2013a; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). By improving their skills, training can also help Saudi Arabian women to remove personal, psychological and organisational barriers and to boost their confidence (Alsuwaida, 2016). Al-Ahmadi (2011) warns of a lack of training programmes and support for Saudi Arabian

women, which may prevent them from achieving leadership positions, and notes that training and guidance are significant for empowering women, improving their self-efficacy and confidence and helping them to overcome other personal and psychological barriers. Four-fifths of survey respondents (197 out of 253) agreed that a lack of professional development training and guidance was a significant personal barrier. The survey results also suggest that women working in lower management are given limited or no opportunities to work in middle management. This lack of middle management experience may then affect their professional development and restrict them from applying for senior management positions, as was suggested by eleven interviewees.

Interpersonal skills constitute the most significant component of leadership skills (Yukl, 2011). Therefore, focusing on the development of interpersonal skills may help in overcoming personal barriers. A professional development programme combined with regular guidance from the senior management team can promote women's empowerment and enhance their confidence (Alsuwaida, 2016). A majority (58%) of survey respondents agreed that women suffer from criticism and discrimination in HE, which the respondents assessed as significantly greater than that received by their male counterparts. Such an environment may also increase the feelings of fear, apprehension and hesitation that amount to personal barriers against women seeking to apply for senior management positions. It is very important that women are provided with an environment that empowers them and encourages them to take challenging roles in their workplaces (DOF_26). This study has found that personal barriers can be removed by encouraging peer support for women, giving them opportunities through which they can engage in professional development, providing guidance regarding ways to overcome cultural and religious barriers and removing their personal or psychological perceptions of restriction.

7.5 Impact of Vision 2030

7.5.1 The effect of Vision 2030 on the organisational barriers affecting ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs

One further aspect of this study is that it has focused on exploring the impact of Vision 2030 on the barriers and opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia. Studies by Miller, Kyriazi and Paris (2017) and Alibeli (2015) have recognised that government policies and standards are influential in developing new opportunities for improving female participation in economic, social and political domains. Findings regarding Vision 2030 have been obtained from the review of the literature and analysis of the interview data. According to Vision 2030 (2018), the government of Saudi Arabia is focusing on developing new opportunities for the young generation of the Kingdom in order to use their knowledge and potential for the prosperity of the country. The intention is that Vision 2030 will lead to an economic transformation in the Kingdom, as a result of which women will be considered as great assets. By the development of new policies for women, the government will provide better chances and opportunities for women to enhance their organisational participation and decision-making autonomy in personal, social and professional life (Alston, 2017).

National policies within the Vision 2030 framework are expected to help in removing various organisational barriers, such as rigid organisational hierarchies and the concentration of decision-making power in educational institutions, while improving women's opportunities for promotion to top management positions, changing perceptions regarding the organisational leadership skills of women and helping them to maintain a good work-life balance. Thirteen of the fifteen interviewees displayed a positive attitude towards the policy transformation to be expected under Vision 2030 and expressed optimism regarding its effects. They believed, for example, that the existing tribal system would be changed through government initiatives. They were also enthusiastic about the new opportunities that they would have in terms of the introduction of new courses and employment possibilities in other sectors of the economy. They believed that these wider employment opportunities would allow women to pursue a wider range of career choices,

which would in turn be likely to boost their chances of success and growth. Similar sentiments are highlighted by AlDoubi (2014).

In support of this belief in progress for women, Vision 2030 has led to the appointment of the first Saudi women ambassador (Sidi and Robertson, 2019), to which the study respondents responded very enthusiastically; eleven interviewees suggested that the appointment of a woman to such a high-profile position would open the way for other women to achieve higher-level management positions. They also felt that this appointment would project a new image of women as not restricted to the traditional roles but free to have a public life. Therefore, this new perspective should also influence organisations and their policies towards women.

Only one interviewee disagreed with the view that Vision 2030 would bring any substantial change for Saudi Arabian women. She was not negative towards the plan per se, but expressed a degree of caution, noting that past efforts in this regard had not led to any meaningful change so far and drawing attention to the possibility, however small, that the outcomes of Vision 2030 would be similarly disappointing. She warned that there might be nothing in the plan which would result in significant and timely changes to the status of women in organisations or in society at large, but that it would take a very long time to overcome the many organisational barriers to women's growth. However, the evidence from the literature shows that Vision 2030 could have a profound impact, as happened in 2012 when the decision was taken to allow women to work in the retail sector, as a result of which the lives of millions of women were transformed. It is therefore possible that the current economic transformation may also bring changes to women's economic independence. All but one of the interviewees concurred with the belief (expressed by HOA_21) that if the reforms are sustained over a long period of time, they are very likely to lead to major changes in Saudi Arabian society for women and will help to remove various organisational barriers that currently hinder their professional progress.

7.5.2 The effect of Vision 2030 on the cultural barriers affecting ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs

Twelve interviewees suggested that Vision 2030 was likely to have an impact on the cultural barriers that have hindered the growth of women for a long time. The evidence

presented in this thesis has shown that female leaders working in Saudi HEIs have expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction with the social, political and economic changes that are occurring and which they expect to occur in the near future. They evidently see the lifting of the driving ban on women as an important cultural change that provides an opportunity for women to increase their freedom and mobility. This cultural change may also impact the attitudes, perceptions and thinking of the Saudi Arabian public at large, challenging the belief that women are fit only for the roles of wives and mothers. The expectation was also expressed of a profound impact on existing cultural barriers, such as the belief that women should not go to work but should remain at home, sacrificing their career ambitions in favour of their family commitments. Only the single interviewee referred to above reported some doubts regarding the ability of the implementation of Vision 2030 to resolve many long-standing barriers affecting Saudi women, fearing that it might fail to change the collective Saudi mindset. Three interviewees also predicted that the Saudi Arabian government would not develop or implement policies that contradicted the cultural beliefs of the population and that this reluctance to challenge the status quo might leave in place many of the cultural restrictions and barriers facing women.

There are various long-held cultural beliefs, with deep historical roots in tribal culture, that affect the status of women in Saudi Arabian society, such as the assertions that women are less intelligent than men and that they lack decision-making capacity, among other conservative perceptions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). However, the interviewees generally appeared to believe that recent policy changes had helped to overcome these negative perceptions, albeit gradually, so that women now felt able to participate more effectively in professional areas. One interviewee added that although progress in this direction in Saudi Arabian society was slow, she believed that it was occurring with little or no voice of opposition, which would be a positive sign that people in general believed that change should occur. Therefore, this thesis concludes that Vision 2030 has the potential to bring about change in Saudi society and help to eradicate the cultural barriers that are affecting the ability, motivation and opportunities for women to occupy leadership roles.

7.5.3 The effect of Vision 2030 on personal barriers affecting ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs

Personal barriers are often those that arise from women's individual perceptions and psychological feelings. In Arab culture and society, women are often placed in passive roles, where they are expected to depend on the males of the family to make decisions of all kinds. Islamic law, conservative traditions and various cultural restrictions have also affected women on the personal and psychological levels. However, this thesis has shown that under the Vision 2030 reforms, Saudi Arabian women have started believing in the possibility of a degree of change in personal barriers, such as those related to family, children, domestic responsibilities, fears, hesitation and apprehension in taking initiatives. Most participants in this study agreed that adding mere words to Vision 2030 regarding the development of women would not in itself bring an overnight change in their lives and that it would take a long time to eliminate the barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions. One reason for believing nonetheless that Vision 2030 may reduce these personal barriers is the inclusion in the plan of the introduction of new technological courses for women, which should help to give them the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and widen their career scope. Through the introduction of new courses, women can also focus on overcoming the personal barriers that restrict the progress of their careers. This is so because these courses are likely to give women access to careers subject to rapid growth, such as in the fields of science and technology, while making them employable in more sectors of industry, rather than confining them to a few areas. New courses such as those in STEM subjects may also help to develop new female teachers and scholars in higher education and to enhance the opportunities for women to follow alternative career options in the field of higher education.

While the female leaders who participated in the research reported in this thesis expressed the belief that not only Saudi Arabia but the world as a whole remains male dominated, all of the interview respondents, with a single exception, agreed that if the Vision 2030 policies are effectively implemented, they are likely to be successful in bringing the desired change. However, the personal and psychological barriers identified here are ones which can be addressed through intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic factors. Therefore, women are required to bring about change in their own personal thinking and must work

towards achieving equality. The participants in this study believed the Saudi government's recent policy initiatives have the potential to lead to a cultural change that would significantly impact the personal lives and perspectives of women and would also help to overcome the personal barriers limiting the abilities, opportunities and motivation of Saudi women in leadership in higher education.

7.6 Policy recommendations

This section considers what kinds of policies will be required in future to overcome the organisational, cultural and personal barriers affecting ability, motivation and opportunities for leadership among Saudi women in HEIs. Women currently enjoy significant participation in Saudi higher education, both as students and as teachers. The application of gender segregation has given them an opportunity to make a career in higher education as teachers and educationists. However, even in all-female universities, women encounter various organisational, cultural and personal barriers. Therefore, there is a requirement for the development and framing of new policies to help them overcome such issues. These new policies are required for women to break down the barriers to their progress and to overcome the glass ceiling effect (Tran, 2015).

Policymakers should consider these barriers and develop initiatives that address the needs and concerns of Saudi Arabian women. Analysis of the survey and interview data reveals that women often feel neglected, as there are no policies that recognise their way of living and their cultural, traditional and family needs. This thesis proposes that the cultural barriers may be overcome with time, as indicated by the cultural changes already occurring in Saudi Arabian society. Meanwhile, the government and policymakers should focus on eliminating the organisational barriers identified here, developing appropriate policies to promote the rights of women within organisations and to provide them with equal opportunities for promotion and participation in decision making. This will go some way towards helping to reduce the glass ceiling effect.

This thesis has shown that the personal and psychological barriers that affect Saudi Arabian women are deeply rooted in a society where culture and tribal traditions continue to influence all aspects of the life of the Kingdom's citizens; therefore, these issues may take a long time to be completely resolved. However, the recent policy initiatives taken by the government have already started to bring about dramatic cultural changes. Further changes in culture and personal values can be encouraged through new policies, and as the participation of women in education and other fields increases, these cultural and traditional barriers may start to diminish in effect.

The most significant need is to remove organisational barriers. Equality-based policies such as equal pay, perks, leadership opportunities and promotion criteria should help women to achieve equality in the workplace. Policies which promote the perspective that women are equal to men and have the right to advance their careers are important. The strict implementation of women's rights and equality-based policies should enhance the confidence and self-esteem of women so that they become more self-motivated and work hard to achieve higher management positions. This study has shown that only a very small number of women have currently achieved leadership positions in higher education in Saudi Arabia, because their career progress has been restricted by the personal barriers of low self-esteem, lack of confidence, fear of initiating, hesitation to stand up for their rights, the feeling of being low in status and the psychological pressure of managing their family responsibilities. It has also been shown that personal and organisational barriers are the major reasons for some women themselves being relatively unenthusiastic about their career growth, so that they perceive work as merely an escape from family life. This reveals a lack of self-motivation which tends to limit the number of women who will rise to leadership positions. Policies designed to reduce the organisational barriers identified in this thesis could directly strengthen the motivation and confidence of women, thus tending to reduce the effect of the glass ceiling that is hinders their access to leadership.

It has been shown that the diverse range of barriers that restrict women are often interrelated, so that sustainable change in one area could be influential across all areas. It is important that policies should be designed to remove organisational barriers in order to help improve the self-efficacy and motivation of women. Therefore, a further policy recommendation would be that the government should develop new provisions for the

training and mentoring of women. The survey and interview findings have shown that lack of training, guidance and mentoring affects the development of women's skills and restricts them from achieving higher management positions. It follows that policies aimed specifically at women should include steps to develop effective training programmes and the provision of mentoring, support and peer guidance. This could potentially boost their motivation, skills and confidence, while helping to overcome organisational and personal barriers. Policymakers should focus on developing special programmes to help in building leadership skills among women, as well as implementing effective talent management programmes.

Talent management is significant to prepare women not only for leadership positions, but for career development at all levels (Varshney, 2019). Women interviewed for this study reported that while some level of training is provided for women in Saudi Arabian HEIs, the programmes are very generic and do not help in developing their skills or capabilities. In the opinion of some interviewees, the funds allocated for professional development were not being used properly, but wasted on training courses providing little professional benefit to the attendees. A policy recommendation arising from this assertion is that government funds should be used effectively to provide evidence-based training and skills improvement programmes, as well as sustained leadership development programmes. Furthermore, where women working in lower and middle management lack the role models needed to encourage and motivate them to attain higher decision-making positions, this should be addressed. Such role models are lacking because so few women have reached such positions. Therefore, future policies should focus on encouraging and promoting to leadership positions qualified and skilled women who would serve as role models for other women and who could encourage them. Interview participants also agreed that having more women in top leadership positions would help them and would boost their confidence.

These policy recommendations should help to address the various organisational, cultural and personal barriers that limit Saudi women's capabilities, motivation and opportunities. They are firmly based on the evidence obtained from the literature and from the qualitative and quantitative research findings. It can be said that such policy developments, if sustained, should serve to reduce the barriers that contribute to the glass ceiling effect,

thereby benefiting Saudi Arabian women, in particular by helping them to rise to leadership positions in higher education.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analytical and synthetic discussion of the findings of the present doctoral research in order to give form to the meaning and purpose of this thesis. It was found that women in Saudi Arabia have less power than men, lower status and fewer rights, thus reducing their opportunities to participate in decision making in the workplace. Such organisational barriers result in the persistent neglect of women at work, denying them equal opportunities to rise to higher-level positions. The synthesis of the findings served to identify a number of cultural, traditional, personal and psychological barriers to the progress of women at all levels which make it difficult for them to achieve a higher status within organisations. This discussion reached the conclusion that although the changes occurring in Saudi Arabian society are slow and may therefore not be of immediate visible benefit to women, they nevertheless have the potential to be substantial if they occur through the implementation of sustainable reforms. There followed a number of policy recommendations to address the needs and concerns of Saudi Arabian women and to support and encourage them in pursuing leadership positions in higher education. These policies should deliver rights-based, equality-based provisions to help women in modern higher education organisations. A final recommendation is for the provision of training in leadership and skills, and a range of talent management programmes, to encourage and motivate women. This thesis has thus opened up a new perspective for policymakers and for women aspiring to leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis advances the research on women in leadership in Saudi Arabia, using the example of Saudi HEIs. Because the Kingdom's education system is segregated by gender, a highly contextualised sample of all-female universities was selected for this research, which has examined in particular the barriers to women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. Whilst adding to a long list of research into women's leadership in Saudi Arabia, this thesis is novel because it has been conducted at a time of transition in the Kingdom, when transitional forces are reshaping many of the barriers that were identified by past researchers as critical to leadership for Saudi women. It specifically identifies the government's Vision 2030 plan as the main development currently shaping the leadership environment for Saudi women. Having identified that women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs is affected by organisational, cultural and personal barriers, this thesis has evaluated the perceived impact of Vision 2030 on these barriers. The findings indicate that the plan is likely to affect both organisational and cultural barriers in the short run, while a longer-lasting impact will be witnessed on the cultural and personal barriers. Furthermore, the research has concluded that if initiatives such as those under Vision 2030 are sustained, they are likely to have a meaningful impact on the aforementioned barriers.

This chapter summarises the key aspects of this thesis. In particular, it reviews the findings and contributions of the study, assesses its limitations and makes suggestions at how this research can be taken further.

8.2 Summary of research

This thesis comprises eight chapters, the first of which provided an overview of the research problem, argued why it was essential to investigate this phenomenon and discussed the contribution made by the research. It was shown that most of the past research had provided limited insight into what kinds of barriers influence women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. The introductory chapter outlined these barriers

and considered the perceived impact of transitional forces on their current and future state.

Chapter 2 presented a thorough review of the Saudi context, including its legal system and other socio-cultural and institutional environmental variables that directly or indirectly affect women's leadership in Saudi HEIs. Chapter 3 continued with a review of existing literature, dealing with the role of women in HEIs, women's leadership and the various barriers that affect women's rise to leadership. Glass ceiling theory was specifically discussed in this chapter because it is one of the most widely discussed theories in the context of deliberate discrimination against women seeking leadership positions. The literature review also considered the impact of barriers on women in different countries including Saudi Arabia and identified a categorisation of the barriers affecting women's rise to leadership, to be adopted throughout the thesis, as organisational, cultural and personal.

Chapter 4 offered an overview of the research methodology and data collection procedures adopted. This study was completed in three stages, beginning with an extensive literature review which served to identify research gaps. The second stage involved a questionnaire survey of female employees working in Saudi HEIs. The methodology chapter elaborated on the steps taken to prepare and formalise the questionnaire, the conduct of the survey and the details of the various statistical tests applied to the data. The third stage of the research comprised a series of interviews with senior-level female professionals working in Saudi HEIs, primarily aimed at understanding in depth the manner in which the three types of barrier affect women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs and how Vision 2030 is likely to affect these barriers and consequently the progress of women to leadership in those organisations. Having discussed the benefits of adopting a pragmatist philosophy and mixed methods for this study and described the data collection procedures and sampling technique, the chapter examined the limitations of the data collection methods and discussed their validity and reliability.

Chapter 5 presented the quantitative findings in the form of a statistical analysis of the data gathered by means of the self-administered questionnaire survey, then Chapter 6

gave a thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data and Chapter 7 delivered a synthetic analysis of the findings as a whole.

This research was primarily aimed at identifying the barriers that affect women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs and the probable effect on them of the Vision 2030 reforms. In pursuit of this aim, it began with a comprehensive literature review which identified three sets of barriers—organisational, cultural and personal—that have affected women's leadership progression. It was found that many of these barriers are overlapping and interconnected. For example, cultural barriers such as the *mehram* practice also affect personal barriers such as women's lack of confidence in their own leadership skills. This emphasises that narrow efforts aimed at countering one particular barrier are unlikely to provide the desired results and that a multidimensional approach is preferable. This is something that Vision 2030 might be able to achieve, because it is not limited to the political and economic spheres but also addresses the socio-cultural environment in Saudi Arabia.

The literature review also revealed that the gender gap in employment is most severe at the top and less marked a lower levels of employment. The government has successfully eliminated any gender gap in tertiary studies in Saudi Arabia, given that the number of women receiving higher education is comparable to that of men. However, there are certain factors that have been overlooked and have caused career progression issues for Saudi women; for example, an insufficient number of STEM courses for women has meant that they have mainly been educated in the social sciences and other subjects which confer a lower level of recognition than those studied by men.

Having thus identified the organisational, cultural and personal barriers to women's rise to leadership in Saudi Arabia, the next step in the research was to conduct a questionnaire survey to identify which of these barriers affect Saudi women in Saudi HEIs. The survey revealed that progression to leadership for these women is indeed affected by all three types of barrier. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with women leaders in Saudi HEIs to explore in detail their perceptions of how their progression to leadership was affected by the various barriers and of how Vision 2030 would be likely to affect these perceived barriers. Consequently, the interviewees were asked to envisage the future state

of these barriers in light of the current and anticipated changes brought in by the Vision 2030 reforms. The findings revealed that most interviewees expected Vision 2030 to have a positive and significant impact on lowering the ensemble of barriers to women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs.

8.3 Key findings

This research has delivered many interesting findings, the first of which is that women can play very positive and constructive roles as leaders, especially in HEIs, because of the nature of leadership required in these institutions. According to the respondents, the caring, supportive and participatory leadership style of women is more suited to educational institutions because their purpose is to nurture and develop talent. Women are also useful because the interviewees indicated that they spend considerable time working for the same organisation. This gives them special contextual knowledge which is quite beneficial in leading those organisations. In gender-segregated and somewhat conservative societies, direct engagement and personal experience can provide individuals with insider knowledge which is useful in developing and implementing effective policies and strategies.

Saudi society is gender segregated at most levels and there may consequently be a general lack of cross-gender issues affecting both males and females. Women leaders believe that they are especially useful in Saudi HEIs because of the gender segregation in the Saudi education system. They also believe that due to gender segregation, male leaders may find it difficult to engage with female staff and learn about their needs and requirements. This may lead to a significant gap between leaders and employees, rendering policies and programmes ineffective. Most of the interviewees recommended appointing women leaders in HEIs because they would be likely to have a better understanding of the issues faced by female staff and students.

The women leaders believed that hiring insiders as leaders might be useful, lending support to the argument that leaders in HEIs must be hired from within the team because they will have better engagement and rapport with the staff. Those with long tenure in an institution will be more aware of its context and culture, allowing such insiders to play more effective

roles as leaders than outsiders could. Consequently, most interviewees recommended internal promotion to leadership, rather than external recruitment. One of the problems that they highlighted in this regard was lack of adequate training and development opportunities for women. According to the interviewees, women staff members should be given more decision-making powers from an early stage in their careers, which would gradually improve their leadership skills, increase their experience and boost their confidence in their ability to lead. This could prove to be somewhat challenging in high power distance cultures like Saudi Arabia, where centralised models are generally preferred over distributed decision making. This was evident in the interviewees' responses regarding personal barriers, which indicated some reluctance among female staff to undertake such responsibilities.

This thesis has shown that in the opinion of Saudi women leaders, all three categories of barriers—organisational, cultural and personal—significantly affect Saudi women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs. The existing literature states that most of the socio-cultural issues are grounded in long-standing cultural practices which are mistakenly assumed to originate from religious teachings, but in fact result from surviving tribal traditions and have no grounding in Shariah principles. The literature reveals that most past governments have found it very difficult to challenge this socio-cultural legacy, as powerful religious scholars have strongly resisted any change in the status quo in this context. However, the current government is successfully challenging many of these practices, including *mehram*, leading to growing optimism amongst Saudi women. Many interviewees expressed the view that recent developments, if sustained, were likely to have very positive outcomes for Saudi women's leadership aspirations. These interviewees found it particularly encouraging that Saudi women were well prepared and required only a certain amount of leadership training to enable them to assume leadership positions. They remained cautious, however, realising that all organisational and governmental efforts could fail if there were no significant shift in the socio-cultural environment of the country. Interviewees also agreed that the government's current efforts were in the right direction, tending to open up Saudi society, to make it more liberal and receptive of the public image of women. They also stressed the need to publicly acknowledge and celebrate the performance of women in order to highlight their abilities and show them in a positive light.

This thesis has shown that Vision 2030 is perceived as likely to have a positive long-term impact on the barriers affecting Saudi women leaders and that consequently, the current state of women's participation in leadership roles in Saudi HEIs is likely to improve in future. However, participants in the study warned that sustaining the current wave of reforms, especially in terms of actually implementing them, will be particularly challenging for the government. In addition, they suggested that the government should undertake more reforms in order to tackle the more stubborn socio-cultural barriers to women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs.

8.4 Achievement of objectives

The first objective of this research was to evaluate the current status of women's leadership in Saudi HEIs and to examine its implications for the Saudi HE system. It has found that women are relatively poorly represented in the leadership of Saudi HEIs, especially at the highest levels. This lack of women in leadership positions has led to a poor development environment for female academics and students alike. For example, this thesis has revealed a perception among participants of insufficient focus on the promotion of courses in STEM subjects for women and inadequate support for female academics to conduct and publish research.

The second objective of the research was to identify the key barriers to Saudi women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. This thesis has reported that women in Saudi HEIs felt themselves to face a number of organisational, cultural and personal barriers, with cultural barriers also influencing some of the personal ones. Organisational barriers such as lack of decision-making opportunities, not being considered for top positions, lack of exposure to leadership and lack of authoritative power were found to be significant obstacles to women's rise to leadership positions. Amongst the cultural barriers, the most critical were found to be negative perceptions of women in leadership, lack of freedom, tribal traditions and family norms. The most critical personal barriers were perceived lack of managerial training and experience, as well as perceived lack of confidence and motivation to lead.

The next objective was to evaluate the perceived impact of Vision 2030 on the future of women's progression to leadership in Saudi HEIs. Vision 2030 was perceived to reduce organisational and cultural barriers in the short and long run and it was found that this is likely to help in lowering the personal barriers to Saudi women's rise to leadership in HEIs. Respondents agreed that the changes already introduced may have a domino effect, thus eventually tending to fill the gender gaps in Saudi society in general. This, in turn, is expected to lower barriers to leadership for Saudi women in HEIs. However, the respondents also suggested that the overall impact of the recent reforms will depend on how effectively these are implemented and whether they are sustained.

The final objective was to identify the possible policy solutions that the Saudi government could undertake in order to lower further the barriers to women leaders' progression in Saudi HEIs. Study participants recommended sustaining the current wave of reforms and putting special emphasis on implementation issues. Other useful tools in the hands of policymakers were found to be steps such as giving more attention and visibility to the achievements of women, having genuine role models and highlighting possible career paths for women. Participants also believed that women should be given more decision-making responsibilities, even if these come with greater accountability, as this might improve their self-confidence and trust in their own abilities to lead. Finally, they recommended adopting strong gender-neutral policies, especially in regard to promotion.

8.5 Key contributions

Past research on the subject of barriers to women's leadership in Saudi Arabia has been extensive and enriching. Saudi Arabia has been a case in point for research into gender inequality, probably because it is widely reported to be the worst performer in this regard among all rich countries. Indeed, researchers are far more forgiving towards countries with low socio-economic and educational status as compared to countries which have high levels of education and strong economic performance. Furthermore, researchers have used Saudi Arabia as an example of gender discrimination in Islamic culture because it is considered a symbol of that culture throughout the world, probably in its capacity as the

location of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. While much of the criticism directed towards Saudi Arabia for ignoring the high level of gender inequality in workplaces and in society may be justified, it should not be forgotten that simple changes can prove revolutionary when it comes to matters of social upheaval. There have been some recent significant developments in Saudi Arabia which require a review of the relevant literature. Past research has highlighted several barriers to women's leadership in Saudi HEIs, but within a span of just two years (2017-19) the Saudi government announced a number of serious steps towards empowering women, such as the relaxation of the male guardianship regulations and the laws governing female employment. These factors have been cited by past researchers as some of the most significant barriers, both symbolic and real, that Saudi women face at work. The removal of such restrictions is no small step and is expected to have a wider socio-cultural impact on women in Saudi Arabian society. However, critics cite some previous developments and their failure to make the expected or desired impact on the status of women in Saudi Arabia.

One of the main challenges in the context of Saudi Arabia has been that some of the previous reforms proved nothing more than public declarations. For example, the male guardianship law regarding the right to seek medical treatment was abolished by the Saudi government, but most hospitals continue to require women to obtain written permission from their *wali,* i.e. the male guardian, before seeking medical treatment and there are no consequences for hospitals that refuse to treat women without such permission. This indicates that the relaxation of the male guardianship law, in that instance, was largely symbolic and may even be termed mere eyewash, having not actually resulted in any meaningful change for women. In this respect, it will be interesting to see whether the reforms announced most recently have more positive, practical and real implications for Saudi women.

In other words, it remains a subject of speculation whether the reforms announced and being implemented under the banner of Vision 2030 are any different and will prove to have a desirable lasting impact, especially on the perceptions of the general public. This will also be helpful in understanding what meaningful reforms could be undertaken by the Saudi leadership to meet the anti-discrimination commitments it made under CEDAW in 2000.

In this respect, this thesis makes several meaningful contributions to existing research. A great deal of research has been conducted on the barriers to leadership for Saudi women and this thesis extends it by seeking to identify novel solutions to these barriers. In particular, it considers how the Vision 2030 reforms are likely to affect these barriers and consequently presents a perceived future image of the leadership environment for Saudi women. In this way, it moves the current academic research forward by anticipating how the present efforts are likely to affect the future and how Saudi policymakers can develop and implement policies to reach a desired future state with respect to the women in leadership in Saudi HEIs.

The responses of women leaders in this research highlight several issues such as lack of skill and knowledge development for women, especially in the leadership context, which continue to undermine efforts in this direction. Participants also highlighted other issues which might affect the Saudi government's efforts to improve the leadership situation for Saudi women.

The findings of this research are useful in the sense that they address possible ways forward. Whist past researchers have focused on the past and present of the problem, this research is aimed at uncovering the likely future and provides some recommendations on how policy could be designed to in order to arrive at a desired future state. The findings of this research are contextual and practically linked with the current programme of transformation being undertaken in Saudi Arabia under the banner of Vision 2030. In this sense, this research makes a very meaningful contribution towards resolving the problem of Saudi women's poor representation in leadership.

8.6 Recommendations

According to the interviewees, a very useful strategy in a high-power distance society like Saudi Arabia would be to build trust in women's leadership capabilities by highlighting their achievements in the public sphere and by appointing and highlighting role models. It is recommended that such a strategy be adopted.

It is also recommended, as some interviewees suggested, that the steps taken by the government should not be symbolic but sincere efforts at reform. For example, women appointed to top leadership positions should not be selected for their socio-political status but instead based on actual and publicly marketable achievements.

The government should promote high quality education for women, such as by creating more STEM courses for women, and should support female academics in pursuing research and publication.

Finally, this study agrees with the recommendation of interviewees that the Saudi government should focus on building leadership capabilities in women by giving them more leadership opportunities and by increasing the availability of training to develop their leadership skills.

8.7 Limitations of the research

The following limitations of the research must be borne in mind while interpreting the findings reported in this thesis:

Most importantly, the findings are based on the self-reported perceptions of the participants. Human perceptions are shaped by a number of factors, such as experiences and beliefs, as well as our interpretation of events. Since these may vary from person to person, so can the perceptions. For example, some individuals may consider the social liberalisation associated with Vision 2030 to be a positive development, while others may believe that it is not right for the conservative Saudi society. Thus, the findings of this thesis should not be interpreted as factual but rather as perceptual. The researcher has tried to generalise the findings as much as possible by using a large and diverse set of respondents and carefully selecting the sample so as to improve the accuracy of the data.

Secondly, the researcher granted complete anonymity to the respondents. Survey data were collected from several universities and measures to ensure anonymity made it impossible to determine how many respondents from each university participated in the research. There is thus a possibility that there were disproportionately many respondents

from one university and too few from another, introducing some degree of bias in the data. However, full anonymity was considered absolutely essential, to ensure not only that all ethical considerations were met but also that respondents provided a large quantity of reliable information without fear of repercussions.

I am a female academic with experience of working in Saudi HEIs and would have qualified to be a participant in the study. Qualitative data were thematically analysed, then categorised as per the pre-identified themes, and as researcher I remained open to identifying new themes. However, my own set of 'insider' knowledge could have led to some interpretation bias. In order to counteract this risk, I have attempted to use as many direct quotes as possible to ensure that my interpretation of the qualitative data is accurate.

8.8 Suggestions for further research

There are several ways in which this research can be extended further. The first suggestion is for a study of the impact of very specific reforms introduced by the Saudi government; for example, one stream of research could examine the impact of the relaxation in *mehram* practice on women's rise to leadership in Saudi HEIs.

Similar research could be conducted in other sectors of the economy or even at a cross-industry level (especially in the healthcare sector) to determine whether the findings reported in this thesis can be generalised.

This research could also be extended to study the impact of the lack of women leaders on the staff and students of female universities in Saudi Arabia. This could include studying the impact on the development of their skills and knowledge, as well as their perceptions of their own future career prospects.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire survey instrument

Section A: ALL ABOUT YOU

What is your age?
(please tick one of the boxes below)

20-25 26-30 31-45 46-50 51-55 56-60 61-65 65-70

What are your qualifications?
(pleasetick all boxes that apply)

Diploma Bachelor`s degree Master's degree Doctorate

What is your current academic rank?
(please tick one of the boxes below)

Teaching Assistant | Lecturer | Assistant Professor | Associate Professor | Full Professor

What is your nationality?
(please tick one of the boxes below)

Saudi Non- Saudi

What is your marital status?
(please tick one of the boxes below)

Unmarried Married Separated Divorced Widowed

How many children do you have?
(please write the number of your children in the box below, if none, write 0)

Children

For how many years have you worked in higher education?
(please write in the box below for how long, in years, you have worked in higher education)

Years of Experience

What level of education did your parents have?
(please tick the relevant boxes)

	No education	Primary School	secondary School	Diploma degree	Bachelor`s degree	Master's degree	Doctorate degree
Mother							
Father							

Have you ever lived outside Saudi Arabia?
(If so, please write in below the countries in which you have lived)

I have never lived outside SA

I have lived outside SA

(Please write the names of the countries in the box to the right)

Have you ever held any positions in a higher education institution with management / administrative responsibilities?
(please tick one box below)

Yes No

If your answer to the previous question is yes, please write the titles of the positions that you have held in the boxes below

Position 1 Title:

Position 2 Title:

Position 3 Title:

Position 4 Title:

It has been said that there is a "glass ceiling" in higher education institutions which prevents women from achieving the highest leadership positions (President, Provost, Rector, Vice Chancellor, Dean) in higher education. If you have heard of the phrase "glass ceiling", please write in the box below what this phrase means to you.

(Please write your comments in the box below

Section B: Organisational challenges

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each statements using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Undecided	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree

Please click on a number from 1 to 5 for each of the statements below.

1. In higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, there is a glass ceiling preventing women from being promoted to senior positions	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
2. In higher education institutions in SA, women are gradually working their way up the career ladder.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
3. In higher education institutions in SA, there is discrimination against younger academics being given senior leadership positions	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
4. In higher education institutions in SA, there is discrimination against non-Saudi academics being given senior leadership positions	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
5. In filling leadership posts in higher education institutions, there is discrimination against family background.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
6. In higher education institutions in SA, women in senior positions feel a sense of lower status when compared with their male colleagues, who have the same job roles	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
7. In leadership in higher education institutions, men have greater access to those with organisational power, than their female equivalents	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○

8. In filling leadership positions in higher education institutions in SA, senior men tend to promote up and coming young men to their ranks but ignore bright women.	1	2	3	4	5
9. In higher education institutions in SA, women and men are treated equally, with regards to promotion.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Women in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions have limited financial powers, when compared to their male colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
11. In higher education institutions in SA, women`s work skills are valued equally with men`s.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Women in senior leadership roles in higher education institutions are more likely to have to submit all their managerial decisions for approval, than their male counterparts.	1	2	3	4	5
13. In higher education, leadership roles are defined too strictly to help leaders to deal with problems	1	2	3	4	5
14. The government should nurture more women leaders in decision making levels within universities.	1	2	3	4	5

In your opinion, what are the most significant organisational barriers specific to higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia that limit the ability of women to be appointed to leadership roles, and how do you think they could be overcome?

(Please write your comments in the box below

SECTION C: Cultural challenges

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each statements using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Undecided	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree

Please click on a number from 1 to 5 for each of the statements below.

1. It is a man`s duty to provide financially for his family.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
2. A woman`s duty is to take care of her husband, and her family	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
3. A woman should sacrifice her career for her husband`s.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
4. In senior leadership roles in all aspects of society women can lead as well as men can.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
5. In general, major decision making, in the economic, political and social spheres should be left to men	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
6. In higher education institutions only men are seen as having real leadership ability	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
7. In higher education institutions, women who want to succeed must become just like men.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
8. In general, men should hold the top positions in society, in social, economic and political spheres.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
9. Fathers should be able to stay at home while mothers go at work.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
10. Looking after children is a woman`s responsibility	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○

11. Women should be in the home, not at work.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Women should not go out to work as this takes jobs away from men.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Women should put family before career.	1	2	3	4	5
14. In higher education institutions, both women and men are encouraged to pay attention to their families' need.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Women should not combine work and motherhood.	1	2	3	4	5
16. In higher education institutions,, women know as many important people as men do.	1	2	3	4	5

What do you think are the most prominent cultural barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and how do you think that they could be overcome?

(Please write your comments in the box below)

Sections – E : Family-work balance

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each statements using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Undecided	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree

Please click on a number from 1 to 5 for each of the statements below.

1. Difficulties with balancing family and work prevents women from assuming leadership responsibilities.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
2. Difficulties with finding good child care prevents women from advancing their careers and attaining leadership positions in higher education institutions	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
3. In higher education institutions, childcare responsibilities are seen as being incompatible with top jobs for women.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
4. In higher education institutions, long hours creates difficulty for working mothers to advance their careers.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
5. In higher education institutions, a scientific career is a problem for women with families.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
6. For working mothers to succeed in their careers, it is essential for them to have support from their husbands and families.	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○
7. In higher education institutions, family and domestic duties mean that women are not as able as men to undertake overtime working	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○

What is Your opinion on women`s role, both at home and at work?

(Please write your comments in the box below)

Section F : Personal barriers

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each statements using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Undecided	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree

Please click on a number from 1 to 5 for each of the statements below.

1. In higher education institutions there is a presumption that women in top leadership positions are less able than their male equivalents.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Women leadership in higher education institutions is characterised by interpersonal skills.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In higher education institutions, young female academics may suffer more criticism from other staff, than their male equivalents.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Female staff in higher education institutions receive less constructive feedback from their superiors in leadership roles when compared to men.	1	2	3	4	5
5. There is a lack of relevant professional development programs to qualify and prepare female leaders in higher education institutions before assigning them to senior administrative and leadership roles	1	2	3	4	5
6. Women feel personally apprehensive about assuming the responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5

that come with undertaking a leadership role within an organisation					
7. In higher education, female leaders often feel isolated from peers	1	2	3	4	5
8. Women in higher education face a lack of support from peers, once they engage in a leadership role	1	2	3	4	5
9. The lack of experience in middle management roles negatively impacts on the opportunities of women to apply for senior leadership positions	1	2	3	4	5
10. Lack of confidence is a challenge for women in higher education senior leadership positions	1	2	3	4	5

What do you think are the most prominent personal barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, and how do you think that they could be overcome?

(Please write your comments in the box below)

Section H: Women in leadership roles, according to Islam:

Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each statements using this scale:

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Tend to Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Tend to Agree	5 Strongly Agree
There is evidence in Islam supporting leadership roles for women	1	2	3	4
Evidence from Islamic literature indicates that women are capable leaders	1	2	3	4
According to Islam, women are allowed to occupy leadership roles	1	2	3	4
There is full equality between men and women in terms of their physical, intellectual and spiritual potential	1	2	3	4

During your academic career, can you recall any instances in which female academics were prevented from gaining access to senior leadership roles, owing to a "glass ceiling" which operated within their institutions? If you do recall such instances, so, please provide further details in the box below.

Do you think that the "glass ceiling" which prevents women from achieving senior leadership roles in higher education institutions, has a greater effect in Saudi Arabia, than in other countries? If so, please explain why you think that this is the case.

(Please write your comments in the box below)

What do you think are the most important barriers faced by women who seek promotion to senior positions in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia today?

(Please write your comments in the box below)

What do you think could be done to improve women`s career prospects in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, by breaking the "glass ceiling"?

(Please write your comments in the box below)

Have you any other comments you wish to make concerning problems women in Saudi Arabia face when trying for promotion to senior leadership positions in higher education institutions?

(Please write your comments in the box below

Are you interested in being interviewed for this study? If so please write your email address in the box below.

Would you like to be sent a copy of the research thesis when it is completed? If so please write your email address in the box below.

THIS IS THE END OF THE SURVEY

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING IT.

Appendix 2 Interview questions

- Can you tell me about yourself- your position, how long you have been working in this field and in this institution?
- Do you feel passionate about this job or are you in this field because of the lack of options in other fields?
- Do you think women are sufficiently represented in leadership positions in Saudi colleges and universities?
- What is your opinion on the need for women leaders in Saudi universities and colleges?
- Do you think women face barriers into getting leadership positions in Saudi universities and colleges?
- What kind of barriers do they face due to the organisation's policies and structure?
- What kind of barriers do they face due to the work practices and culture in their organisations?
- How does Saudi culture affect Saudi women's ability to rise to leadership positions in Saudi colleges and universities?
- Do you think that Family-work balance management prevent women from gaining top management positions?
- What kind of personal barriers prevent women from reaching top management positions in Saudi higher education institutions?
- Are there any other factors that you think may hinder Saudi women's rise to leadership positions in Saudi colleges and universities?
- How do you think the Vision 2030 is affecting the factors that we just discussed?
- Do you think the Vision 2030 will bring any lasting changes in Saudi Arabian universities for women leaders?
- What suggestions do you have for policy makers to improve the overall environment to increase women's participation in leadership in Saudi colleges and universities?
- Which of the barriers you mentioned are particularly critical in your opinion?